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MARVEL PREVIEW
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MARVEL PREVIEW
PRESENTS
STAR-LORD
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ALL NEW!
ONE MAN AGAINST A GALACTIC EMPIRE!
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STARLIN

STAN LEE PRESENTS

Vol. 1/No. 11

STAR-LORD

Summer 1977

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SECOND LAUNCH!

A foreward by Editor John Warner.

It began just about one year ago. It's hard to believe that it is all about to be realized. *Starlord* lives — again!

For that selfsame year I've bent a number of ears; friends in the industry and fans, not to mention a few just plain interested (and, possibly, disinterested) parties. Wild-eyed and enthusiastic, I told all these people the high expectations I had for this book. I have high expectations for any book I produce, but somehow this one project became special. And, invariably, any given project falls short of one's initial expectations. It is the curse of the creative mind — you set impossibly high goals for yourself and then feel disappointment with your work because you fell just short. But *Starlord* is the exception. Having now seen just about the entire book complete, it has so completely fallen in line with my original conception of the project that it is almost scarey.

And that is the magic of this book. Five people forming a perfect and balanced synthesis of concept and execution, each one's contribution enriching the one before it.

Magic.

I've mentioned on several occasions that I have a sort of God complex about this book. But it brings up a curious question — just exactly what is it that I contributed to this book? Chris Claremont wrote it. John Byrne penciled it. Terry Austin rendered it in ink and added zips. Tom Orzechowsky lettered it and created the magnificent title designs. And a number of diverse hands in production have slaved over the less spectacular but all-too-necessary niggling details that must be looked after before the book heads for the printer.

What exactly is the function of an editor?

Good question. After two and one half years of serving Marvel Comics in one editorial capacity or another, you would think I'd know. I'm not sure.

One of the better descriptions of editing I have ever run across appeared in a guest editorial by SF writer Fred Pohl in the June 1974 issue of WORLDS OF IF magazine. He states: "An editor is a middleman. He stands between the publisher and the writer; between the writer and the reader; between the artist and the printer ... trying to make these irreconcilable pairs somehow play nicely together. It isn't easy."

Stated in other words, an editor is like a very specialized engineer who is responsible for the function of a very sophisticated creative machine — a magazine. The editor sees (or tries to see) that the machine runs as smoothly and efficiently as possible. He must be sure not only that each part works well but that all the parts fit together and that the whole contraption functions as a unit.

An editor is a yes and no man, and there is no great secret shared by all editors telling them when to say yes or no. There are basics you can use as guidelines, if you're careful not to get too dogmatic with them, and there are certain mechanical processes that are wholly predictable. But mostly it is a combination of intuition, opinion and just plain luck. That's the rough part. If your intuition is reliable, you're set. If you're somehow out of tune, you may not work things out smoothly, no matter how good your intentions.

Editing is vision. It is finding people whom you think can come collectively closest to creating your vision.

And that, friends, is what is really so special for me about this magazine. *That* is the magic of *Starlord*. That, despite the odds, the final magazine so exactly fulfilled that vision; the vision of an original SF novel in a comics format.

As most of you know, this is actually the second appearance of *Starlord*. The first was in MARVEL PREVIEW #4 and there have been a number of alterations in the concept. A few explanations are in order.

The most noticeable element missing is the astrology angle. I actually liked the astrology angle — unfortunately, no one but Steve Englehart, the original writer, could have maintained it. None of the rest of us really know enough about astrology and it is not something you can understand with a few nights research. I would have been curious to see where Steve would have taken it and, in fact, the only reason he was not chosen as the writer for this project is that he, currently at least, has commitments elsewhere. I have a great deal of respect and affection for Steve, as both a writer and as a friend. However, that is most certainly *not* to imply that Chris Claremont was merely a compromise. I think a gander at the X-MEN and his other books should be sufficient evidence that Chris is a polished and sensitive wordsmith, combining imaginative conceptuals, action and stirring emotional textures that give his writing a very distinctive quality. Hell, if this book doesn't prove that, I give up!

And it was no accident that the artist picked for *Starlord* is John Byrne. John's feel for science fiction has been well illustrated by his work on SPACE: 1999 for another publisher. It seemed only natural to pair John with Chris — especially considering the close working rapport the two have developed through their months of collaboration on IRON FIST and MARVEL TEAM-UP. Combined with the inking acumen of Terry Austin, we think John has robustly rendered one of his best stories to date.

We also set the story some bit of time after *Starlord* 's first appearance so that we could make some alterations on Peter Quill's character. We did so because both Chris and I felt uncomfortable with Quill being quite as twisted as he was in the first story. However, I don't think we have contradicted anything in the first issue. Time and his new awareness have mellowed Quill out just a bit.

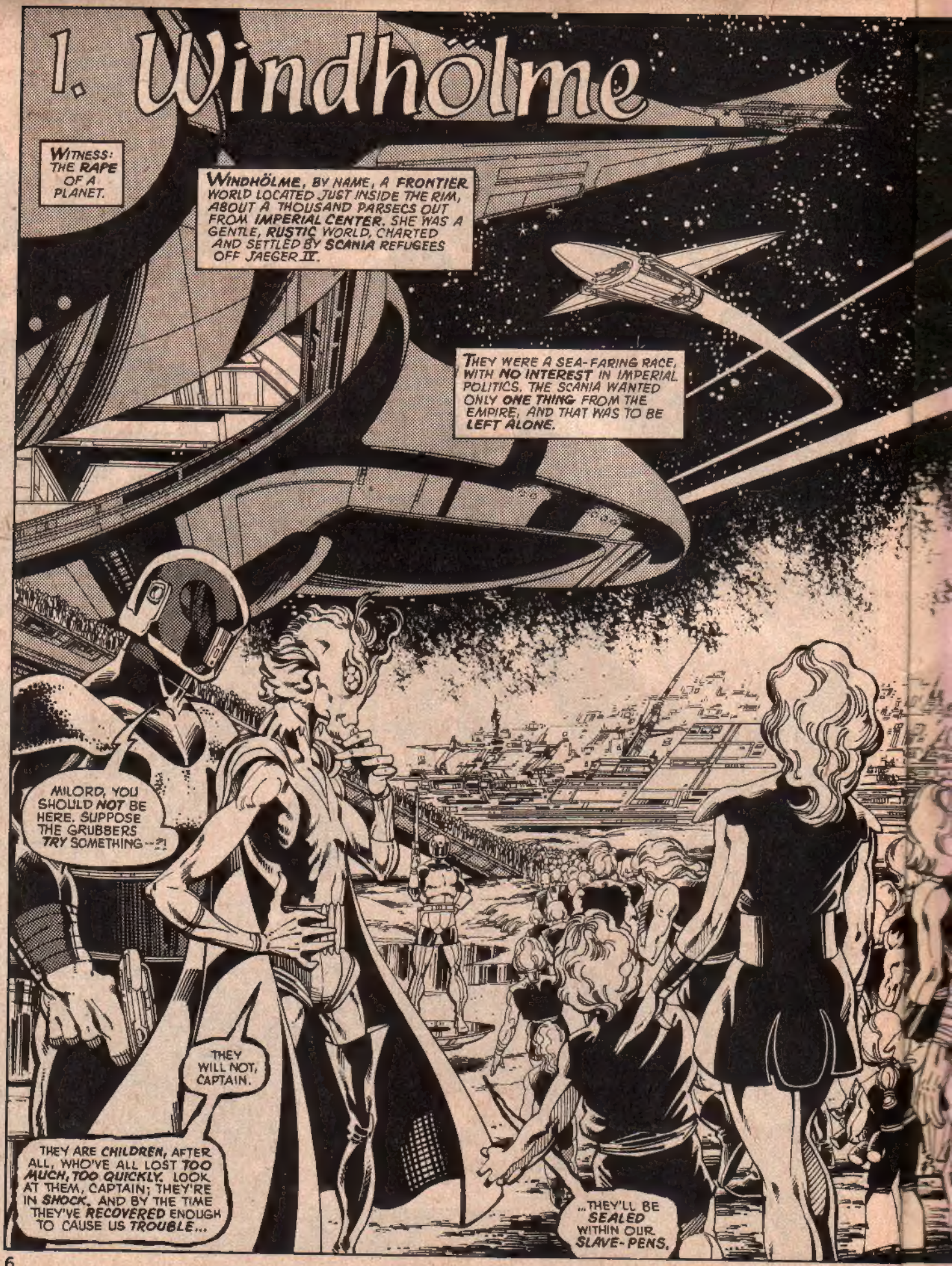
So here it is. Read it and, I hope, enjoy it. Hopefully you'll like it enough to want to see more *Starlord* "novels." I certainly do.

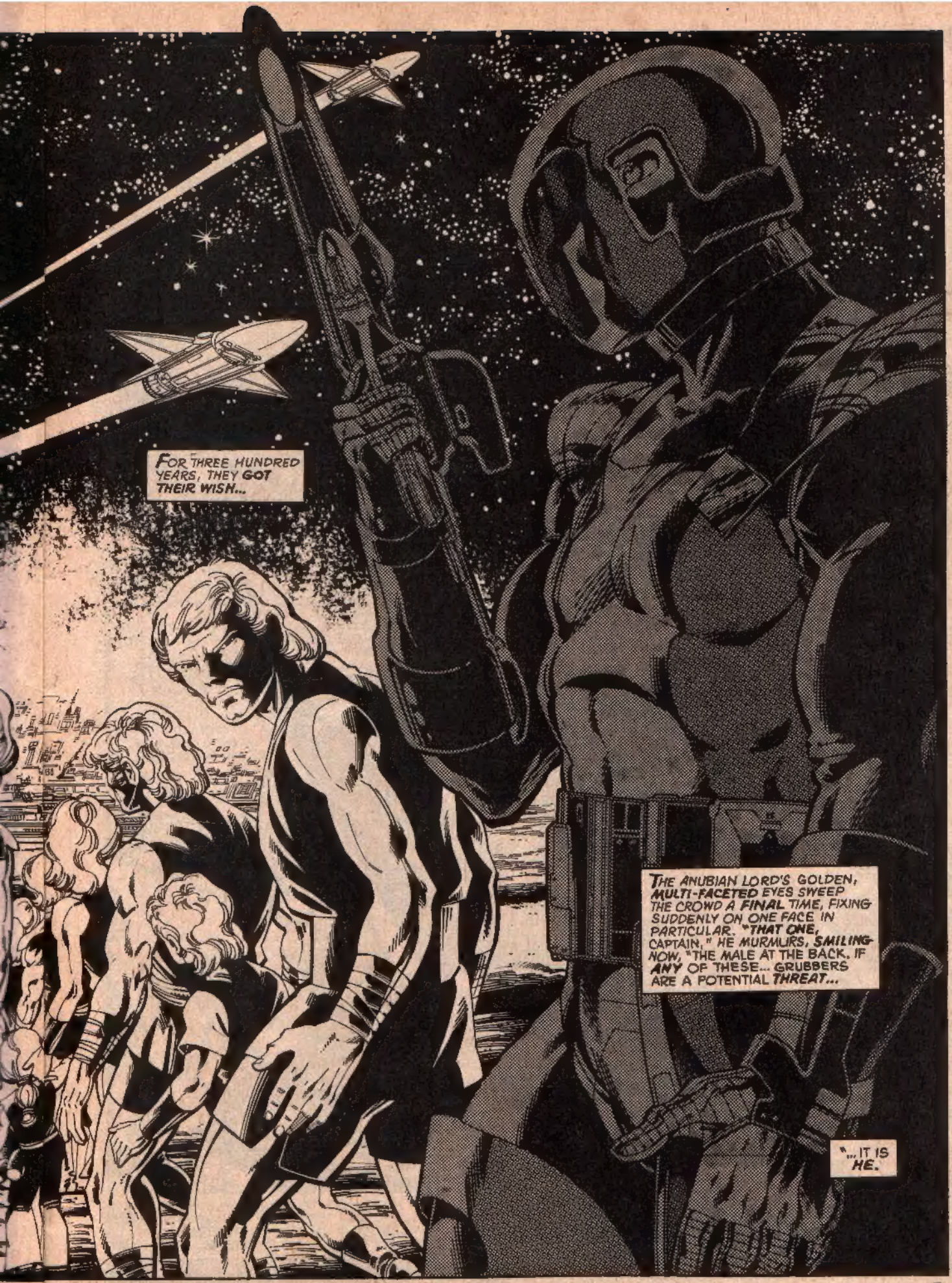
Finally, I would like to thank Chris, John Byrne, Terry Austin and Tom Orzechowski (whose calligraphy is most certainly a vital artistic contribution to this book) for, one and all, sharing my unbridled enthusiasm for *Starlord* It shows in their work. I'd also like to thank Archie for his encouragement as well as Roger Slifer and Ralph Macchio for help along the way.

I'm counting on you, the reader, to let us know if it was all worth it.

— JOHN WARNER, EDITOR.

Inks: TERRY AUSTIN Lettering & Title Design: TOM ORZECHOWSKI


1. Windhölme
WITNESS: THE RAPE OF A PLANET.
WINDHÖLME, BY NAME, A FRONTIER WORLD LOCATED JUST INSIDE THE RIM, ABOUT A THOUSAND PARSECS OUT FROM IMPERIAL CENTER. SHE WAS A GENTLE, RUSTIC WORLD, CHARTED AND SETTLED BY SCANIA REFUGEES OFF JAEGER IV.
THEY WERE A SEA-FARING RACE, WITH NO INTEREST IN IMPERIAL POLITICS. THE SCANIA WANTED ONLY ONE THING FROM THE EMPIRE, AND THAT WAS TO BE LEFT ALONE.
MILORD, YOU SHOULD NOT BE HERE. SUPPOSE THE GRUBBERS TRY SOMETHING--?!
THEY WILL NOT, CAPTAIN.
THEY ARE CHILDREN, AFTER ALL, WHO'VE ALL LOST TOO MUCH, TOO QUICKLY. LOOK AT THEM, CAPTAIN; THEY'RE IN SHOCK. AND BY THE TIME THEY'VE RECOVERED ENOUGH TO CAUSE US TROUBLE...
...THEY'LL BE SEALED WITHIN OUR SLAVE-PENS.


FOR THREE HUNDRED YEARS, THEY GOT THEIR WISH...
THE ANUBIAN LORD'S GOLDEN, MULTI-FACETED EYES SWEEP THE CROWD A FINAL TIME, FIXING SUDDENLY ON ONE FACE IN PARTICULAR. "THAT ONE, CAPTAIN," HE MURMURS, SMILING NOW, "THE MALE AT THE BACK. IF ANY OF THESE... GRUBBERS ARE A POTENTIAL THREAT...
"...IT IS HE.

THE SURVIVORS ARE HERDED QUICKLY, **BRUTALLY**, THROUGH THE SLAVER'S ENTRY PORTS, THEIR WAY **LIT** BY WINDHÖLME'S BURNING **HORIZON**; A FEW **THOUSAND** CHILDREN SPARED OUT OF A POPULATION OF **EIGHT MILLION**.

THE RAIDERS HAD BEEN THOROUGH, AND **MERCILESS**; THEY'D BURNED DOWN **EVERYONE** OVER THE AGE OF SEVENTEEN AND EVERYONE WHO **RESISTED**.

AT **DAY'S END**, WINDHÖLME HAD BEEN THEIRS, HER SURVIVORS MERELY ANOTHER **HIGHLY EXPLOITABLE RESOURCE**.

ACCELERATION... CRUSHING US TO THE... DECK... AND THOSE **ARMORED BUTCHERS** CAN ONLY... **LAUGH**...

HIS NAME IS **KIP**...

... **FIRST-BORN SON** OF GUNNAR HÖLM, WHO WAS HIMSELF **FLEET CAPTAIN** OF THE WESTERN ISLES, ONE OF THE MOST **RESPECTED** MARINERS IN ALL THE **CLANS**.

AGAINST HIS WILL, KIP'S MIND DRIFTS **BACK** ACROSS THE HOURS, TO SUNRISE THIS MORNING -- AN **ETERNITY** AGO...

HE AND HIS **PARENTS** HAD BEEN HEADING INTO SKALSØ, HIS FATHER SUMMONED TO A MEETING OF THE **HIGH COUNCIL**, WHEN...

A MOMENT LATER, THE UNIVERSE **EXPLODED** AROUND THEM AS **ENERGY BOLTS** RAKED THE HARBOR, A **DIRECT HIT** TURNING GUNNAR AND MARIE HÖLM TO **CINDERS**...

THAT **ROARING** -- LORD OF THE DEEP, **AIRCRAFT**!

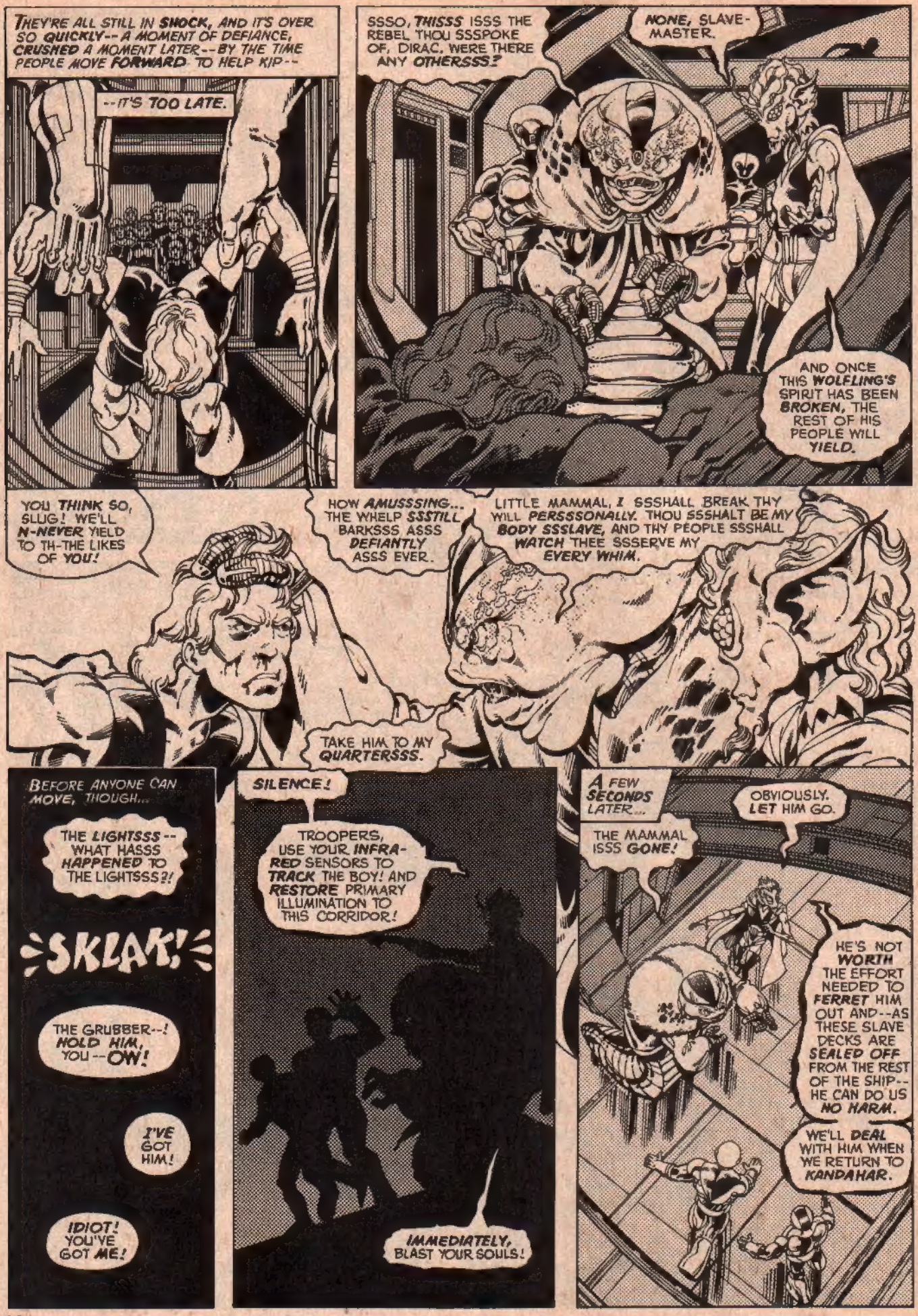
WHAT ARE THEY DOING SO **FAR** FROM THE STARPORT? THEY HAVE **NO RIGHT**--!

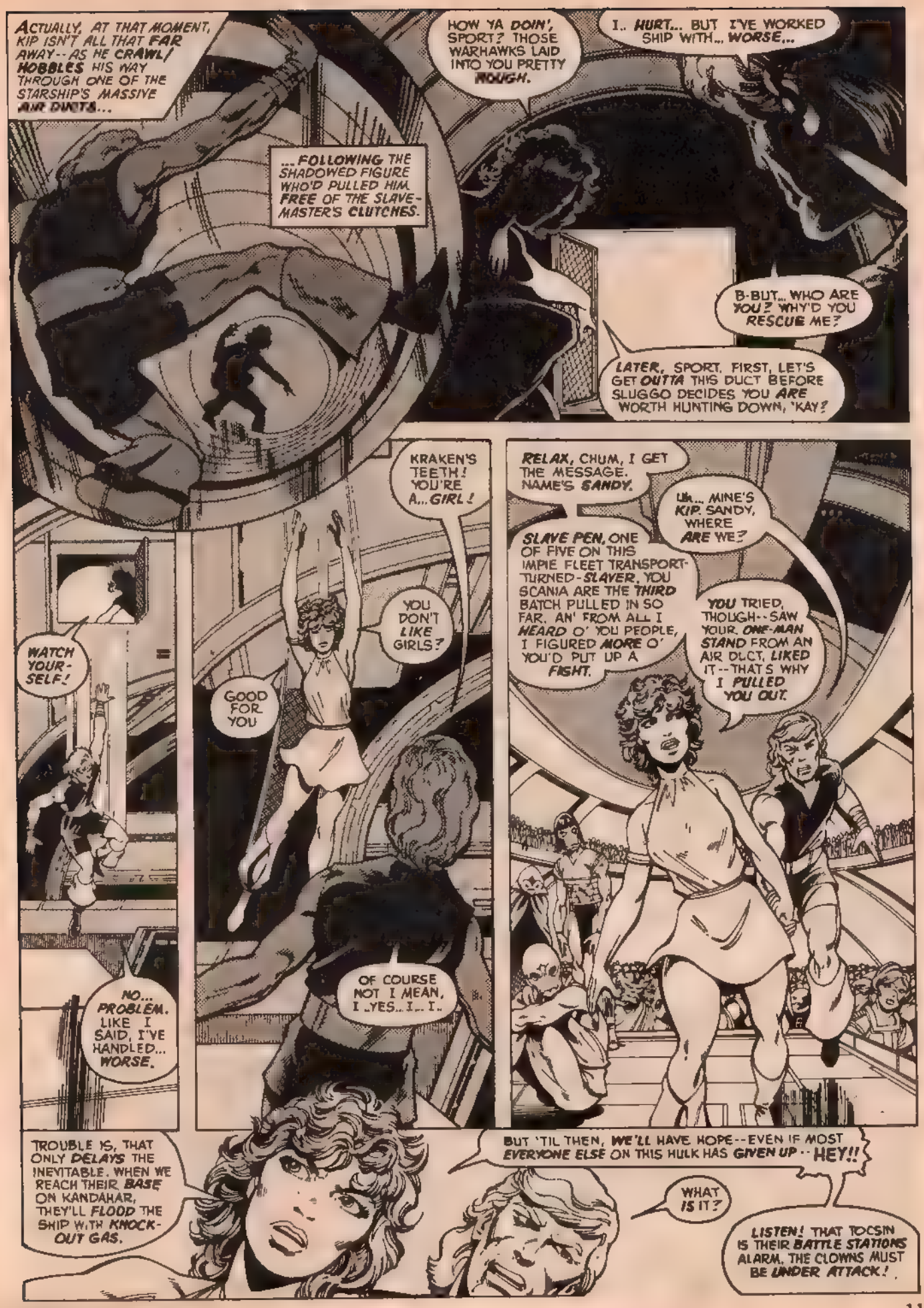
FATHER, THEY'RE **NOT** ORDINARY 'PORT CRAFT--THEY'RE **IMPERIAL STAR-FIGHTERS**!

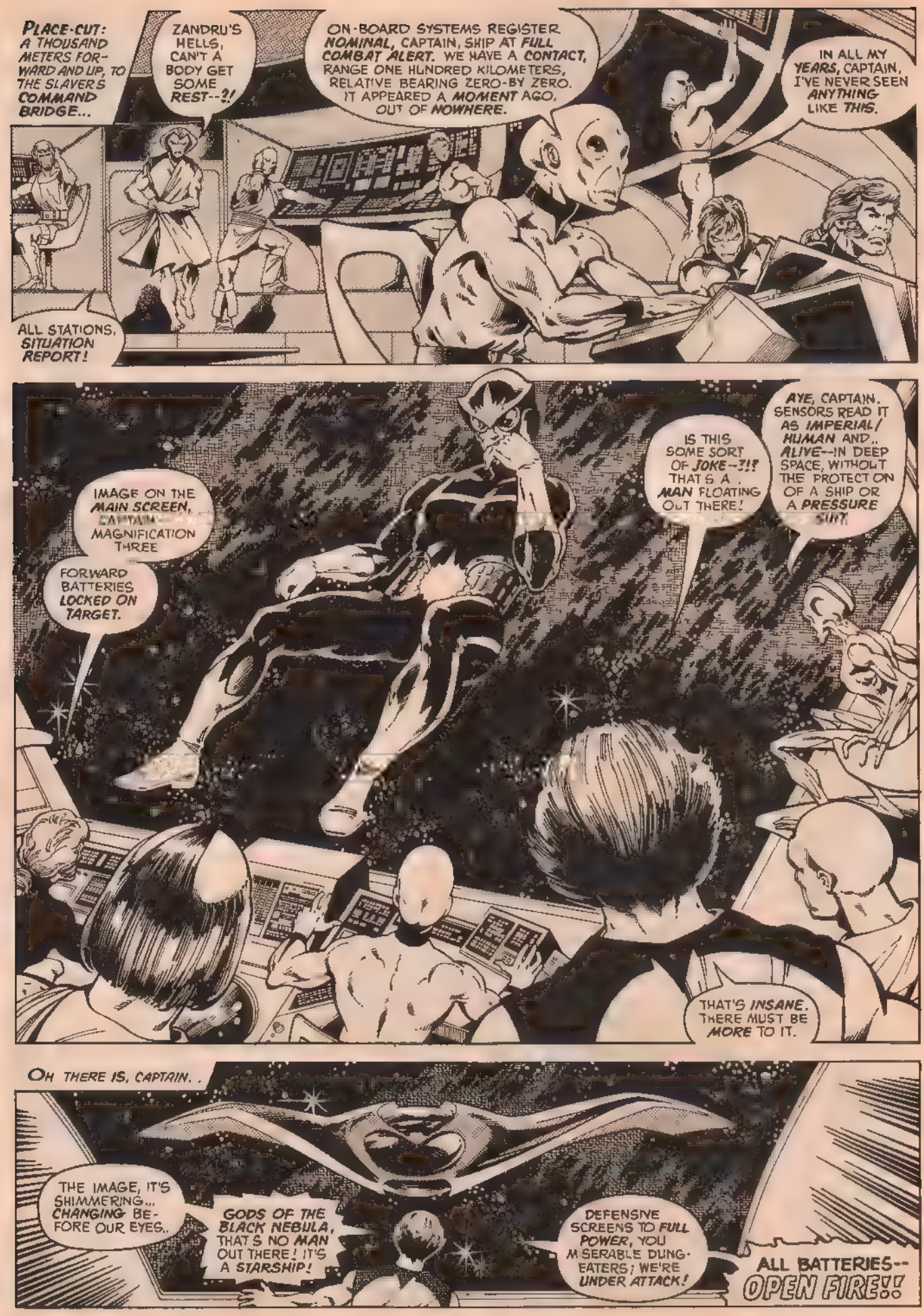
SZRAAK!

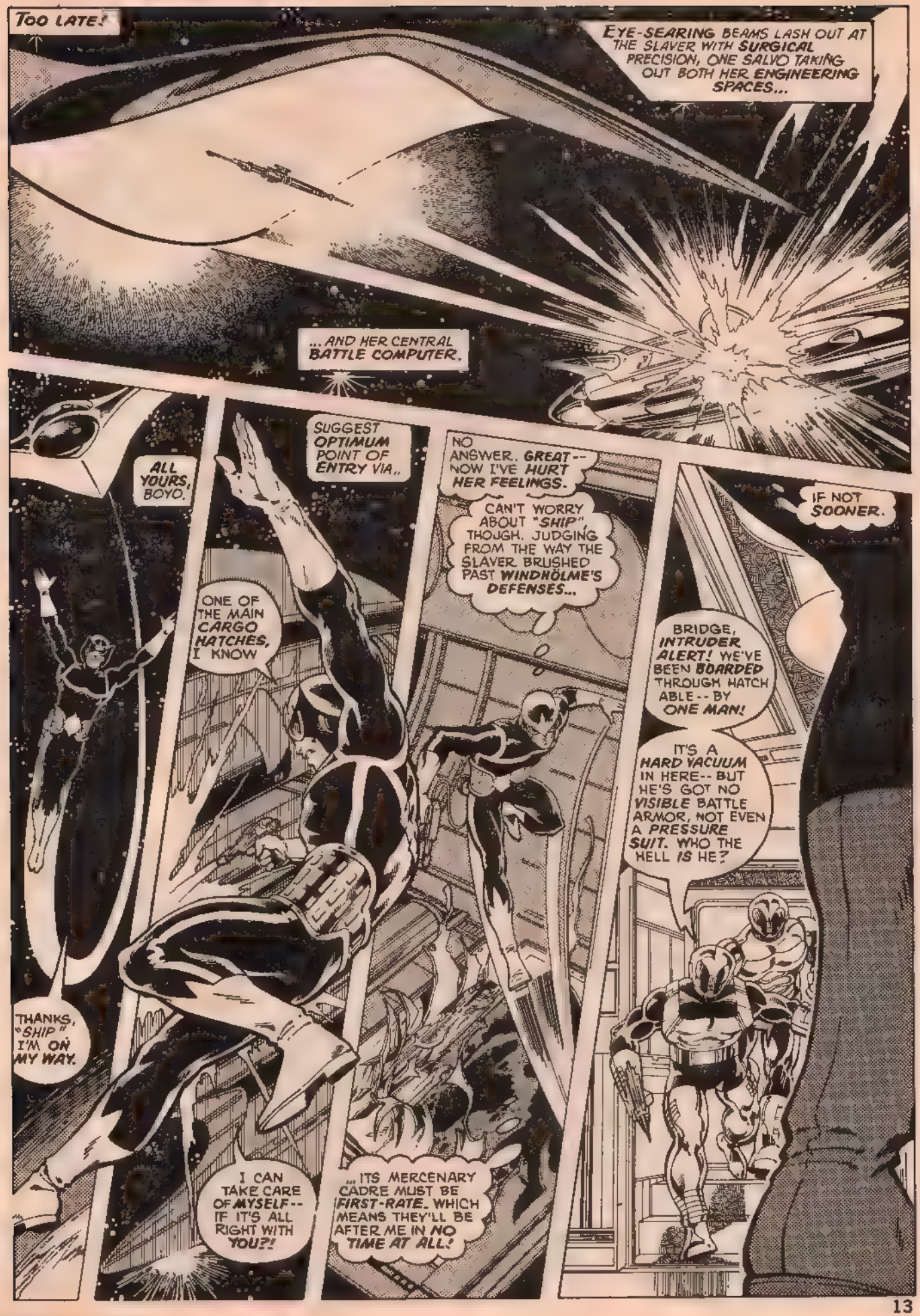
...THE **BLAST CONCUSSION** HURLING KIP OVER THE SIDE. HE REMEMBERED **LITTLE** AFTER THE FIRST ATTACK, AND FOR THAT HE WAS **GRATEFUL**.

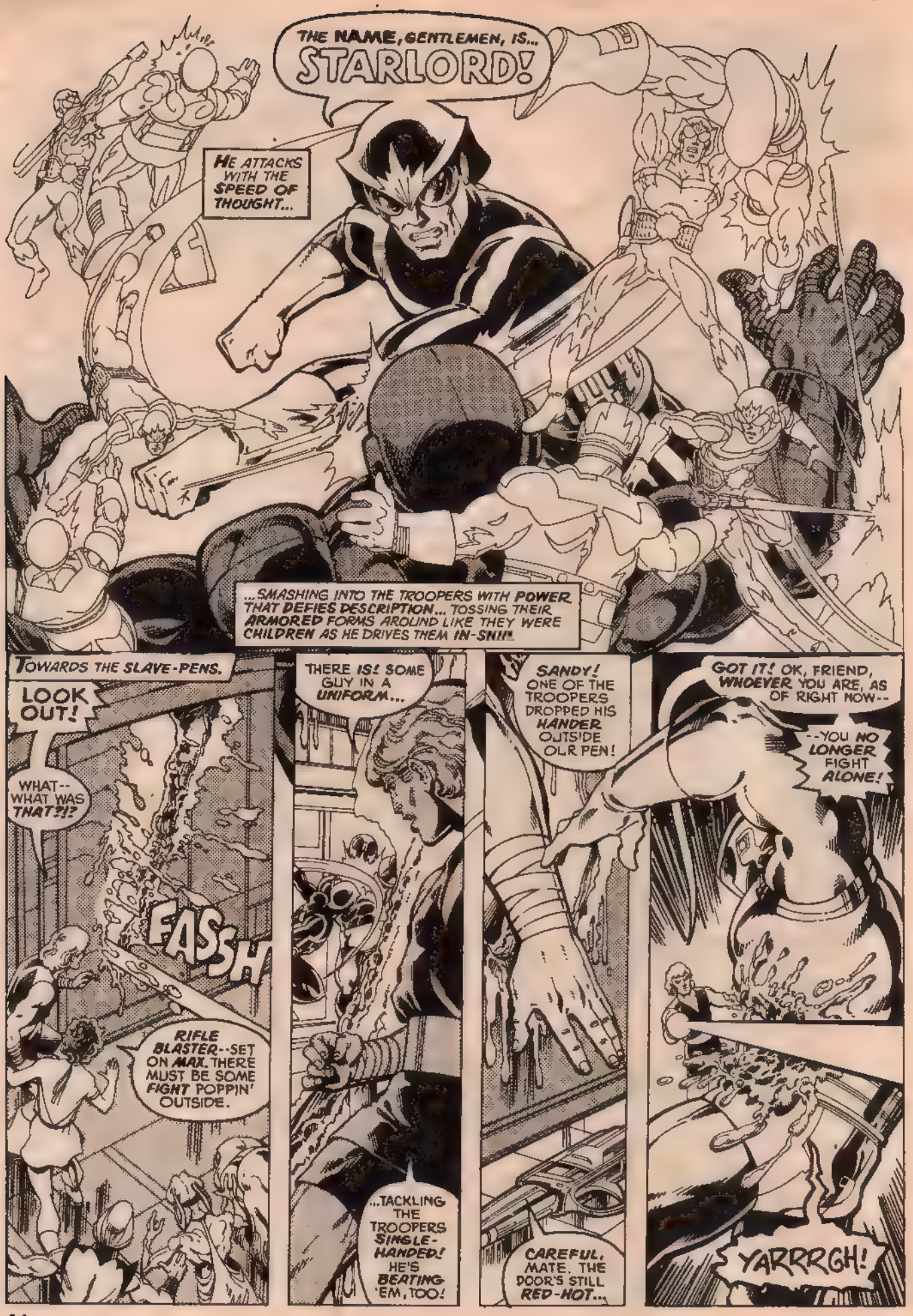
ON YOUR FEET, GRUBBER! WE'RE IN ORBIT NOW...
...AN' THE CAPTAIN WANTS YOU IN SLAVE PENS BEFORE WE WARP!
SO MOVE IT!
OH, I'LL MOVE IT, TROOPER--
--BUT NOT THE WAY YOU EXPECT!
WE'RE NOT SLAVES, BUTCHER-- WE'RE SCANIA!
AND WE WON'T GO DOWN WITHOUT A FIGHT!
HEY!
YOU WANT A FIGHT, WOLFLING?
THEN YOU'LL GET A FIGHT.
TOO BAD NAKED FLESH ISN'T GOING TO DO MUCH GOOD AGAINST BATTLE ARMOR.
KRAK!
UNNNGNH!
THREE OF THEM CONVERGE ON THE BOY AND HE GOES DOWN INSTANTLY UNDER THEIR STEEL-SHOD FISTS.
IT ISN'T EVEN A CONTEST.
GODS, THEY'RE KILLING HIM!
WHAT CAN WE DO?! IF WE TRY TO HELP KIP--
--THEY'LL CUT US DOWN AS WELL.


THEY'RE ALL STILL IN SHOCK, AND IT'S OVER SO QUICKLY--A MOMENT OF DEFIANCE, CRUSHED A MOMENT LATER--BY THE TIME PEOPLE MOVE FORWARD TO HELP KIP--
--IT'S TOO LATE.
SSSO, THISSS ISSS THE REBEL THOU SSSPOKE OF, DIRAC. WERE THERE ANY OTHERSSS?
NONE, SLAVE-MASTER.
AND ONCE THIS WOLFLING'S SPIRIT HAS BEEN BROKEN, THE REST OF HIS PEOPLE WILL YIELD.
YOU THINK SO, SLUG! WE'LL N-NEVER YIELD TO TH-THE LIKES OF YOU!
HOW AMUSSSING... THE WHELP SSSTILL BARKSSS ASSS DEFIANTLY ASSS EVER.
LITTLE MAMMAL, I SSSHALL BREAK THY WILL PERSSSONALLY. THOU SSSHALT BE MY BODY SSSLAVE, AND THY PEOPLE SSSHALL WATCH THEE SSSERVE MY EVERY WHIM.
TAKE HIM TO MY QUARTERSSS.
BEFORE ANYONE CAN MOVE, THOUGH...
THE LIGHTSSS--WHAT HASSS HAPPENED TO THE LIGHTSSS?!
SKLAK!
THE GRUBBER--! HOLD HIM, YOU--OW!
I'VE GOT HIM!
IDIOT! YOU'VE GOT ME!
SILENCE!
TROOPERS, USE YOUR INFRA-RED SENSORS TO TRACK THE BOY! AND RESTORE PRIMARY ILLUMINATION TO THIS CORRIDOR!
IMMEDIATELY, BLAST YOUR SOULS!
A FEW SECONDS LATER...
THE MAMMAL ISSS GONE!
OBVIOUSLY. LET HIM GO.
HE'S NOT WORTH THE EFFORT NEEDED TO FERRET HIM OUT AND--AS THESE SLAVE DECKS ARE SEALED OFF FROM THE REST OF THE SHIP--HE CAN DO US NO HARM.
WE'LL DEAL WITH HIM WHEN WE RETURN TO KANDAHAR.


ACTUALLY, AT THAT MOMENT, KIP ISN'T ALL THAT FAR AWAY--AS HE CRAWL/HOBBLES HIS WAY THROUGH ONE OF THE STARSHIP'S MASSIVE AIR DUCTS...
...FOLLOWING THE SHADOWED FIGURE WHO'D PULLED HIM FREE OF THE SLAVE-MASTER'S CLUTCHES.
HOW YA DOIN', SPORT? THOSE WARHAWKS LAID INTO YOU PRETTY ROUGH.
I.. HURT... BUT I'VE WORKED SHIP WITH... WORSE...
B-BUT... WHO ARE YOU? WHY'D YOU RESCUE ME?
LATER, SPORT. FIRST, LET'S GET OUTTA THIS DUCT BEFORE SLUGGO DECIDES YOU ARE WORTH HUNTING DOWN, 'KAY?
WATCH YOUR-SELF!
KRAKEN'S TEETH! YOU'RE A...GIRL!
YOU DON'T LIKE GIRLS?
GOOD FOR YOU
NO... PROBLEM. LIKE I SAID, I'VE HANDLED... WORSE.
OF COURSE NOT I MEAN, I..YES.. I... I..
RELAX, CHUM, I GET THE MESSAGE. NAME'S SANDY.
UH... MINE'S KIP. SANDY, WHERE ARE WE?
SLAVE PEN, ONE OF FIVE ON THIS IMPIE FLEET TRANSPORT-TURNED-SLAYER. YOU SCANIA ARE THE THIRD BATCH PULLED IN SO FAR. AN' FROM ALL I HEARD O' YOU PEOPLE, I FIGURED MORE O' YOU'D PUT UP A FIGHT.
YOU TRIED, THOUGH--SAW YOUR ONE-MAN STAND FROM AN AIR DUCT, LIKED IT--THAT'S WHY I PULLED YOU OUT.
TROUBLE IS, THAT ONLY DELAYS THE INEVITABLE. WHEN WE REACH THEIR BASE ON KANDAHAR, THEY'LL FLOOD THE SHIP WITH KNOCK-OUT GAS.
BUT 'TIL THEN, WE'LL HAVE HOPE--EVEN IF MOST EVERYONE ELSE ON THIS HULK HAS GIVEN UP -- HEY!!
WHAT IS IT?
LISTEN! THAT TOCSIN IS THEIR BATTLE STATIONS ALARM. THE CLOWNS MUST BE UNDER ATTACK!

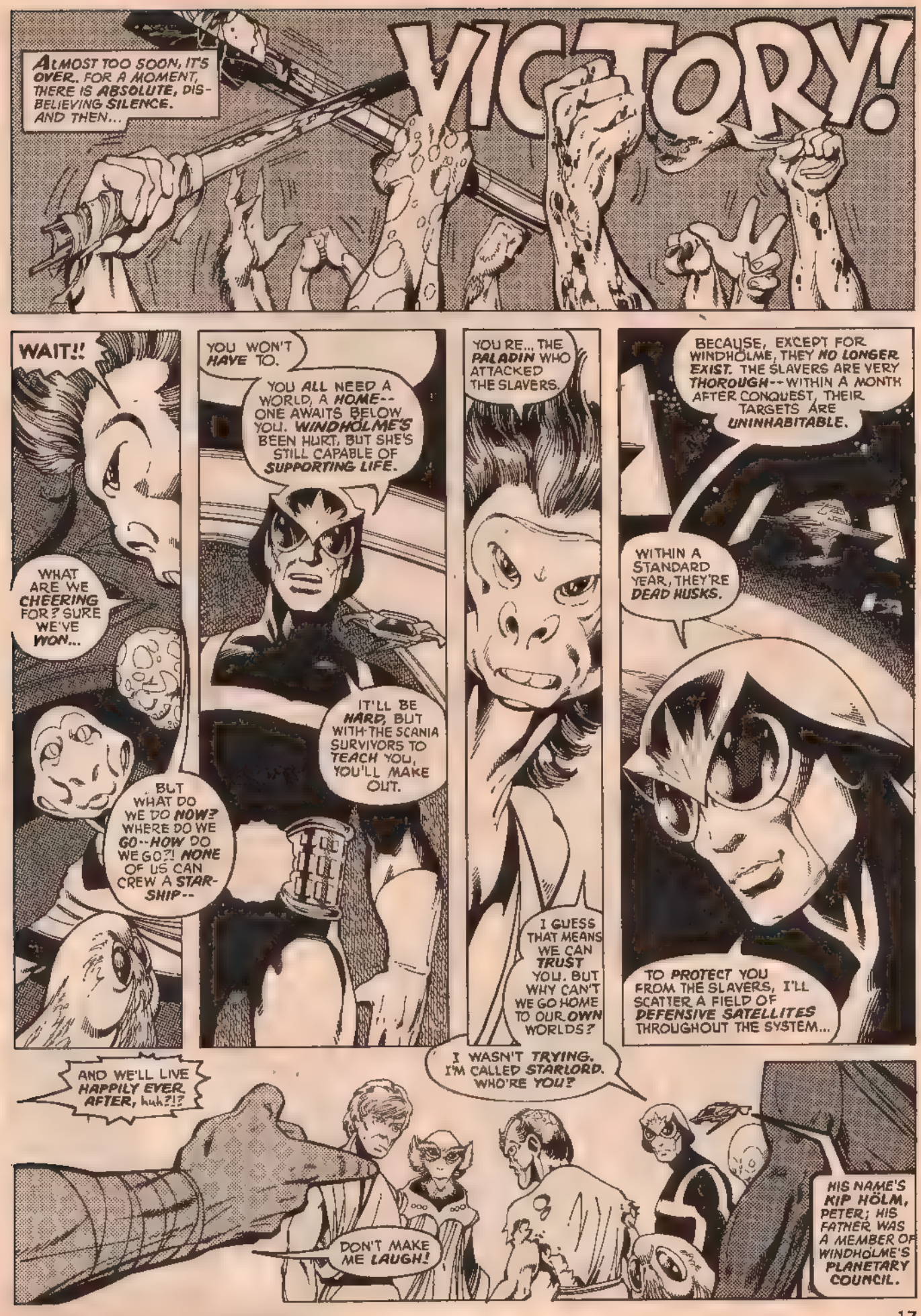

PLACE-CUT: A THOUSAND METERS FORWARD AND UP, TO THE SLAVER'S COMMAND BRIDGE...
ZANDRU'S HELLS, CAN'T A BODY GET SOME REST--?!
ON-BOARD SYSTEMS REGISTER NOMINAL, CAPTAIN, SHIP AT FULL COMBAT ALERT. WE HAVE A CONTACT, RANGE ONE HUNDRED KILOMETERS, RELATIVE BEARING ZERO-BY ZERO. IT APPEARED A MOMENT AGO, OUT OF NOWHERE.
IN ALL MY YEARS, CAPTAIN, I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS.
ALL STATIONS, SITUATION REPORT!
IMAGE ON THE MAIN SCREEN, CAPTAIN--MAGNIFICATION THREE
FORWARD BATTERIES LOCKED ON TARGET.
IS THIS SOME SORT OF JOKE--?!? THAT'S A MAN FLOATING OUT THERE!
AYE, CAPTAIN. SENSORS READ IT AS IMPERIAL/HUMAN AND.. ALIVE--IN DEEP SPACE, WITHOUT THE PROTECTION OF A SHIP OR A PRESSURE SUIT.
THAT'S INSANE. THERE MUST BE MORE TO IT.
OH THERE IS, CAPTAIN..
THE IMAGE, IT'S SHIMMERING... CHANGING BEFORE OUR EYES..
GODS OF THE BLACK NEBULA, THAT'S NO MAN OUT THERE! IT'S A STARSHIP!
DEFENSIVE SCREENS TO FULL POWER, YOU MISERABLE DUNG-EATERS; WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!
ALL BATTERIES--OPEN FIRE!!


TOO LATE!
EYE-SEARING BEAMS LASH OUT AT THE SLAVER WITH SURGICAL PRECISION, ONE SALVO TAKING OUT BOTH HER ENGINEERING SPACES...
...AND HER CENTRAL BATTLE COMPUTER.
ALL YOURS, BOYO.
THANKS, "SHIP" I'M ON MY WAY.
SUGGEST OPTIMUM POINT OF ENTRY VIA,,
ONE OF THE MAIN CARGO HATCHES, I KNOW
I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF-- IF IT'S ALL RIGHT WITH YOU?!
NO ANSWER. GREAT-- NOW I'VE HURT HER FEELINGS.
CAN'T WORRY ABOUT "SHIP", THOUGH. JUDGING FROM THE WAY THE SLAVER BRUSHED PAST WINDHOLME'S DEFENSES...
...ITS MERCENARY CADRE MUST BE FIRST-RATE. WHICH MEANS THEY'LL BE AFTER ME IN NO TIME AT ALL!
IF NOT SOONER.
BRIDGE, INTRUDER ALERT! WE'VE BEEN BOARDED THROUGH HATCH ABLE-- BY ONE MAN!
IT'S A HARD VACUUM IN HERE-- BUT HE'S GOT NO VISIBLE BATTLE ARMOR, NOT EVEN A PRESSURE SUIT. WHO THE HELL IS HE?


THE NAME, GENTLEMEN, IS... STARLORD!
HE ATTACKS WITH THE SPEED OF THOUGHT...
...SMASHING INTO THE TROOPERS WITH POWER THAT DEFIES DESCRIPTION... TOSSING THEIR ARMORED FORMS AROUND LIKE THEY WERE CHILDREN AS HE DRIVES THEM IN-SHIP.
TOWARDS THE SLAVE-PENS.
LOOK OUT!
WHAT-- WHAT WAS THAT?!?
FASSH
RIFLE BLASTER--SET ON MAX. THERE MUST BE SOME FIGHT POPPIN' OUTSIDE.
THERE IS! SOME GUY IN A UNIFORM...
...TACKLING THE TROOPERS SINGLE-HANDED! HE'S BEATING 'EM, TOO!
SANDY! ONE OF THE TROOPERS DROPPED HIS HANDER OUTSIDE OUR PEN!
CAREFUL, MATE. THE DOOR'S STILL RED-HOT...
GOT IT! OK, FRIEND, WHOEVER YOU ARE, AS OF RIGHT NOW--
--YOU NO LONGER FIGHT ALONE!
YARRRGH!

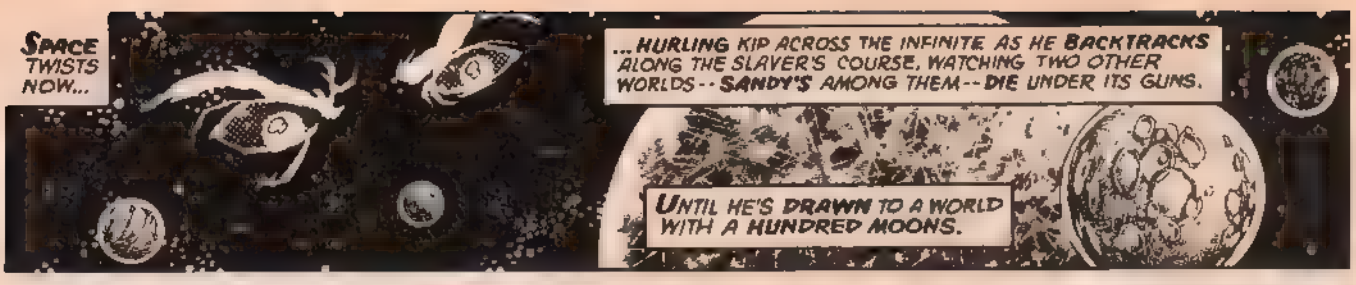
ACCORDING TO THE SCHEMATICS "SHIP" FIXED FOR ME, THIS CORRIDOR SHOULD LEAD TO THE BRIDGE...
THERE IT IS-- BUT THEY'VE SEALED THE COMBAT AIRLOCK, FIFTY CENTIMETERS OF TEN-POINT STEEL.
I'LL HAVE TO BURN THROUGH.
SO SIMPLE... I JUST FOCUS MY CONCENTRATION, LET THE POWER FLOW FROM ME TO MY WEAPON...
...THEN TO THE AIR-LOCK.
AND I'M IN-- COURTESY OF A WEAPON LIMITED ONLY BY THE POWER OF MY WILL-- AFTER ALL THIS TIME, THAT STILL SCARES ME.
I SCARE ME.
HEY, THEY'RE IN A TEARING HURRY. WONDER..
AND BUILDING IN INTENSITY...
..WHY?
THKOW
EXPLOSIVE CHARGES, RIGGED TO EVERY CONSOLE! GOING OFF IN SEQUENCE--!
.. UNTIL THE SLAVER'S PRIMARY HULL SHATTERS UNDER THEIR HAMMERBLOWS.
CHRIST, THE ENTIRE FORE END OF THIS TUB'S OPEN TO SPACE, THE DECOMPRESSION VOIDING EVERYTHING THAT'S NOT BOLTED DOWN!
GOT TO HANG ON! THE VACUUM CAN'T HURT ME..
...BUT I CAN'T AFFORD TO WASTE TIME FIGHTING MY WAY BACK INSIDE.
I'LL LAY ODDS THIS ENTIRE HULK IS LACED WITH AUTO-DESTRUCT CHARGES.
ALL THE COMMAND CREW HAS TO DO IS EJECT IN A LIFEBOAT, CUE THE DETONATOR--THEN BYE-BYE EVIDENCE, BYE-BYE SHIP, BYE-BYE SLAVES...

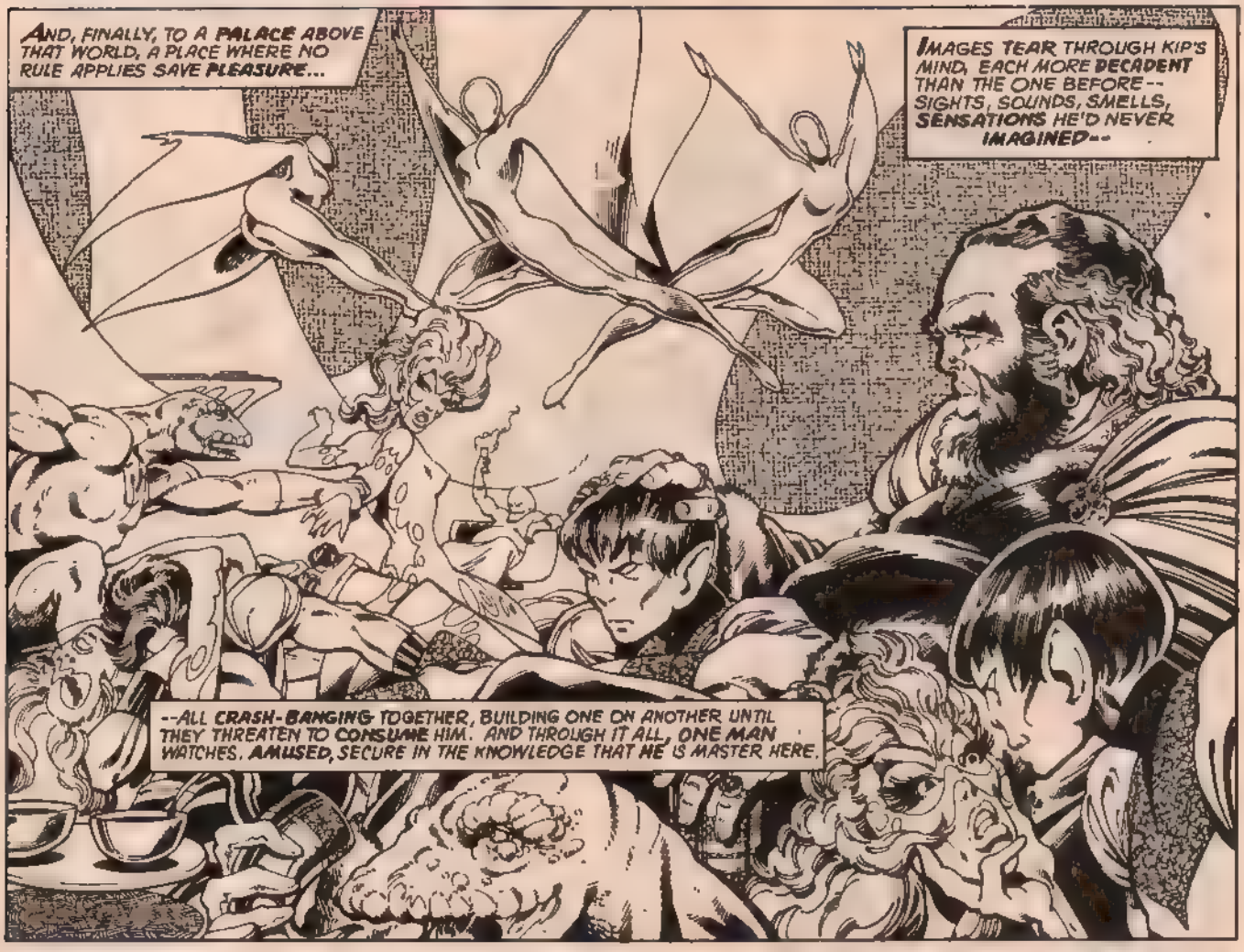
THAT WAS THE GENERAL IDEA...
YOU'VE GONE FAR ENOUGH, BUTCHERS!
A LAST, GALLANT STAND, eh, BOY? PITY WE'VE NO TIME TO HUMOR YOU.
THE WINDHOLME REBEL -- STANDING BETWEEN US AND THE LIFEBOAT BAY.
USE YOUR BLASTER, TAK. KILL HIM!
GO AHEAD, TAK. BUT YOU CAN'T KILL US ALL!
BY THE GREAT MARSSSH!
SSSLAVESSS! ALL AROUND -- CLOSSSING IN!
STOP BABBLING, YOU MISSHAPEN FOOL -- FIGHT!
IT'S THEIR LIVES OR OURS!
SHREEE
WE'VE GOT SUPERIOR WEAPONS -- USE THEM!
IN MINUTES, THE PASSAGEWAY IS A CHARNAL HOUSE, THICK WITH THE STENCH OF BLOOD AND BURNED FLESH, THE HARSH SNAP OF BLASTER BEAMS MINGLING WITH THE SCREAMS OF THE DYING.
IT'S A BRUTAL FIGHT--
...ONE FOUGHT WITHOUT QUARTER, WITHOUT MERCY.
WITHOUT REGRET.
IT -- IT'S HORRIBLE! WE'RE TEARING THEM LIMB FROM LIMB... I...
KRAKEN'S TEETH, WHY DON'T I FEEL ANYTHING?!
DON'T WASTE YOUR TEARS ON THESE SCUM, KIP -- THEY'RE NOT WORTH IT.


VICTORY!
ALMOST TOO SOON, IT'S OVER. FOR A MOMENT, THERE IS ABSOLUTE, DISBELIEVING SILENCE. AND THEN...
WAIT!!
WHAT ARE WE CHEERING FOR? SURE WE'VE WON...
BUT WHAT DO WE DO NOW? WHERE DO WE GO--HOW DO WE GO?! NONE OF US CAN CREW A STARSHIP--
YOU WON'T HAVE TO.
YOU ALL NEED A WORLD, A HOME--ONE AWAITS BELOW YOU. WINDHOLME'S BEEN HURT, BUT SHE'S STILL CAPABLE OF SUPPORTING LIFE.
IT'LL BE HARD, BUT WITH THE SCANIA SURVIVORS TO TEACH YOU, YOU'LL MAKE OUT.
YOU'RE... THE PALADIN WHO ATTACKED THE SLAVERS.
I GUESS THAT MEANS WE CAN TRUST YOU. BUT WHY CAN'T WE GO HOME TO OUR OWN WORLDS?
BECAUSE, EXCEPT FOR WINDHOLME, THEY NO LONGER EXIST. THE SLAVERS ARE VERY THOROUGH--WITHIN A MONTH AFTER CONQUEST, THEIR TARGETS ARE UNINHABITABLE.
WITHIN A STANDARD YEAR, THEY'RE DEAD HUSKS.
TO PROTECT YOU FROM THE SLAVERS, I'LL SCATTER A FIELD OF DEFENSIVE SATELLITES THROUGHOUT THE SYSTEM...
I WASN'T TRYING. I'M CALLED STARLORD. WHO'RE YOU?
AND WE'LL LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER, huh?!?
DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH!
HIS NAME'S KIP HÖLM, PETER; HIS FATHER WAS A MEMBER OF WINDHOLME'S PLANETARY COUNCIL.

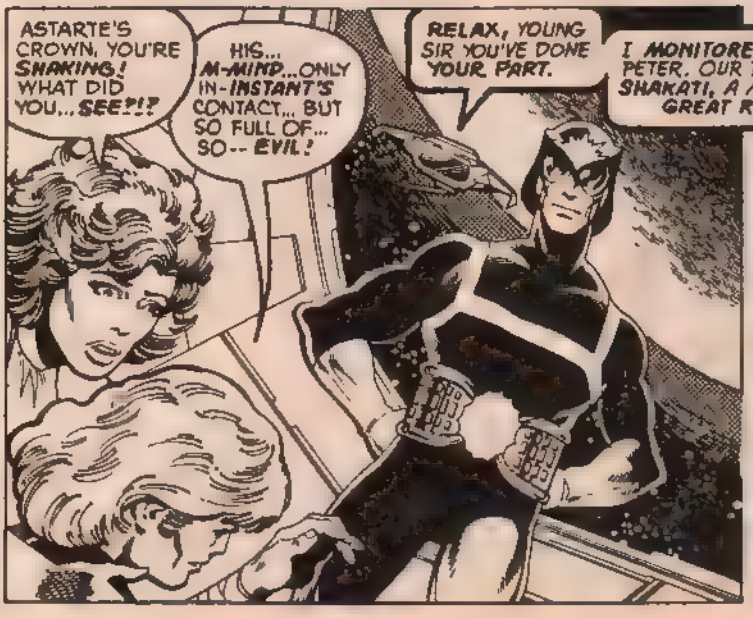
YOU SAY WE'RE SAFE, BUT FOR HOW LONG?!? UNTIL A SATELLITE BREAKS DOWN, OR GETS CLIPPED BY A METEOR--OR THE SLAVERS FIGURE OUT HOW TO BEAT THEM?!
IF YOU REALLY WANT TO PROTECT US, "STARLORD", WHY DON'T YOU FIND WHOEVER'S BEHIND THIS WHOLE ROTTEN MESS AND PUT THEM OUT OF BUSINESS?!
FIESTY LITTLE KID, ISN'T HE? REMINDS ME OF SOMEONE, Y'KNOW... A HUMAN-TYPE GUY NAME OF PETER QUILL...
SHUT UP, "SHIP"...
MEMORIES--TUGGING STARLORD BACK TO EARTH, TO A COLORADO HILLSIDE WHERE A YOUNG BOY KNELT BESIDE HIS MURDERED MOTHER'S BODY...
... AND SWORE VENGEANCE.
IT'S LIKE LOOKING IN A MIRROR. THE WORDS ARE DIFFERENT, BUT THE FEELINGS ARE THE SAME.
TWISTING KIP'S SOUL AS THEY TWISTED MINE.
WHAT DO YOU WANT, KIP?
WHAT'S MINE BY RIGHT!
SOMEONE SENT THE SLAVERS TO WINDHOLME--I WANT THAT SOMEONE'S LIFE! AND IF I HAVE TO...
...I'LL GO THROUGH HELL TO GET IT!
IF VENGEANCE IS YOUR GOAL, BOY--YOU WILL.
BUT ONE STEP AT A TIME. WE'VE GOT TO FIND THAT "SOMEONE" BEFORE WE CAN STOP HIM, OR HER, "SHIP"--?!
MY WIDGET HERE HAS SCANNED THE NAVCOMPS--IF THIS HULK HAS A BASE, ONLY THE CAPTAIN KNEW IT...
...AND, I THINK, ONE OTHER.
OFF-LOAD THE "PASSENGERS" PLANET-SIDE, PETER--THEN RENDEZVOUS WITH KIP AND THE WIDGET IN THE SLAVER'S AUXILIARY CONTROL.
YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING?
ONLY A HUNCH, M'LOVE, AND A THIN ONE AT THAT. ONE THAT MUST NEEDS BE PLAYED QUICKLY--OR NOT AT ALL.

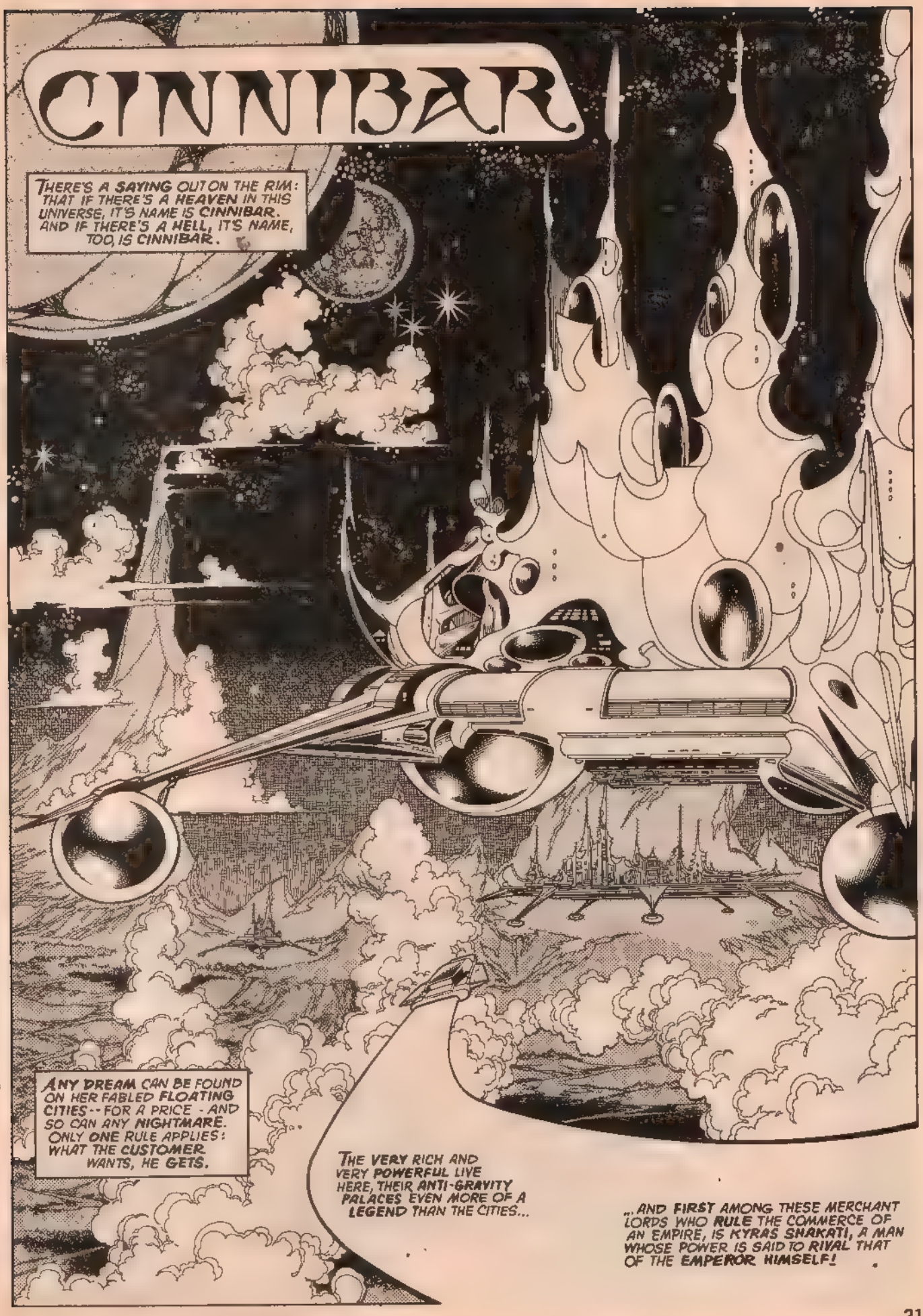
IT'S TWO DAYS BEFORE THE EVACUATION'S COMPLETE, THE FORMER SLAVES SETTLING IN ON WINDHOLME'S WESTERN ISLES-- WHILE ON THE ORBITING SLAVER...
I'M GLAD YOU STAYED, SANDY.
DON'T MENTION IT, BLONDIE SOMEONE'S GOTTA KEEP YOU OUT OF TROUBLE.
IF THAT'S TRUE, SANDY, YOU'VE GOT YOUR WORK CUT OUT FOR YOU.
ALL RIGHT, "SHIP" YOU'VE KEPT US ALL IN SUSPENSE LONG ENOUGH. HOW RE WE GOING TO FIND THE SLAVERS' BASE?
NOT "WE", STARLORD--KIP. MY BIO-SCAN INDICATES HE'S WHAT THE SCANIA CALL A "WINDRUNNER", A HIGH-RANGE PSYCHIC WHOSE TALENT'S USED TO CHART THE KRAKEN...
...LEAD THE FLEETS TO THOSE WORTH HUNTING.
STEER 'EM CLEAR OF THE KING KRAKEN WHO HUNT THE FLEETS IN RETURN
USING THIS BRIDGE AS A FOCAL POINT, YOU THINK HIS TALENT CAN FIND THE BASE?
I-- I DON'T KNOW.
MY TALENT IS A... PRIVATE THING, BUT, IF IT'S OUR ONLY HOPE...
.. I'LL... DO IT.
THE SHIP, THE WORLD, BLURS AROUND THE BOY..
.. TIME TWISTING BACK UPON ITSELF AS KIP RELIVES THE EVENTS OF THE PAST FEW DAYS ...
... AND FINDS THE HURT-- THE AGONY OF LOSS--STILL AS GREAT AS EVER.

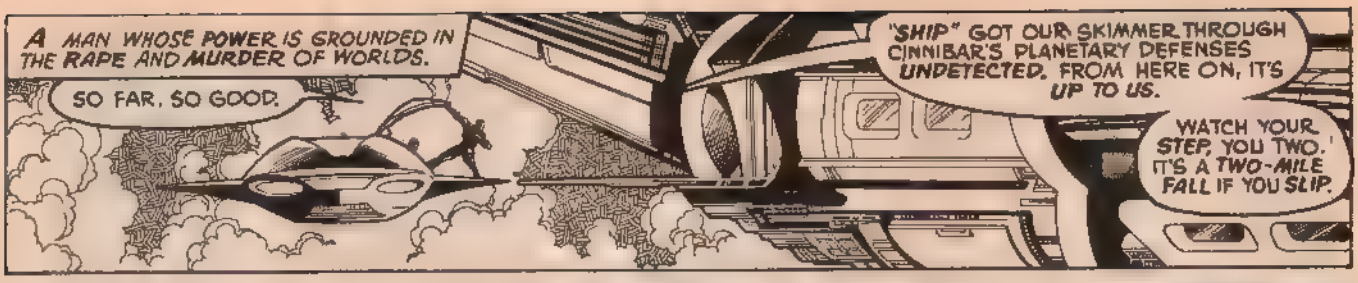

SPACE TWISTS NOW...
...HURLING KIP ACROSS THE INFINITE AS HE BACKTRACKS ALONG THE SLAVER'S COURSE, WATCHING TWO OTHER WORLDS -- SANDY'S AMONG THEM -- DIE UNDER ITS GUNS.
UNTIL HE'S DRAWN TO A WORLD WITH A HUNDRED MOONS.


AND, FINALLY, TO A PALACE ABOVE THAT WORLD, A PLACE WHERE NO RULE APPLIES SAVE PLEASURE...
IMAGES TEAR THROUGH KIP'S MIND, EACH MORE DECADENT THAN THE ONE BEFORE -- SIGHTS, SOUNDS, SMELLS, SENSATIONS HE'D NEVER IMAGINED--
--ALL CRASH-BANGING TOGETHER, BUILDING ONE ON ANOTHER UNTIL THEY THREATEN TO CONSUME HIM. AND THROUGH IT ALL, ONE MAN WATCHES, AMUSED, SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HE IS MASTER HERE.

LIKE A MOTH TO THE FLAME, KIP'S MIND DRIFTS CLOSER TO THE FAT MAN'S. THEY TOUCH, AND...
NO!!
KIP!!


ASTARTE'S CROWN, YOU'RE SHAKING! WHAT DID YOU... SEE?!?
HIS... M-MIND...ONLY IN-INSTANT'S CONTACT... BUT SO FULL OF... SO -- EVIL!
RELAX, YOUNG SIR YOU'VE DONE YOUR PART.
I MONITORED THE BOY'S TRANCE, PETER. OUR TARGET IS KYRAS SHAKATI, A MERCHANT OF GREAT REKNOWN...
...AND OUR DESTINATION IS SHAKATI'S HOMEWORLD, DELTA CORIANUS IV.
CINNIBAR!

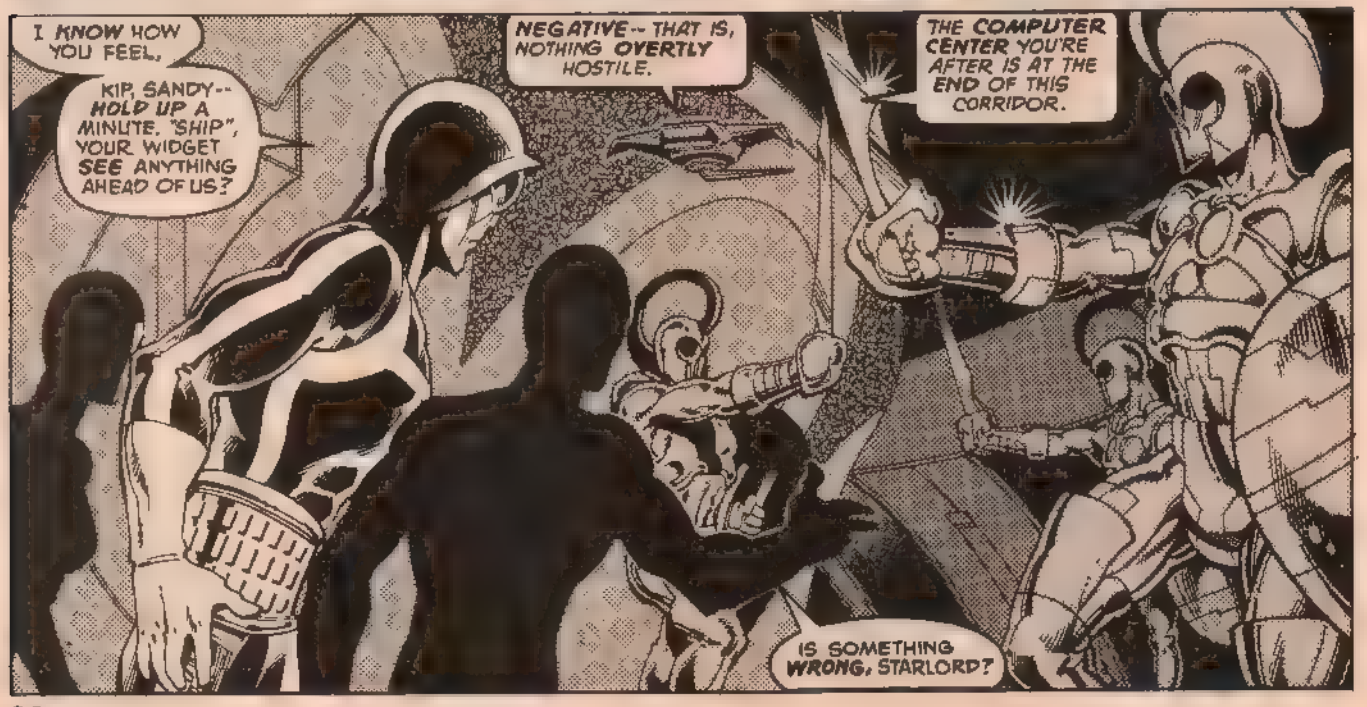

CINNIBAR
THERE'S A SAYING OUT ON THE RIM: THAT IF THERE'S A HEAVEN IN THIS UNIVERSE, IT'S NAME IS CINNIBAR. AND IF THERE'S A HELL, IT'S NAME, TOO, IS CINNIBAR.
ANY DREAM CAN BE FOUND ON HER FABLED FLOATING CITIES -- FOR A PRICE - AND SO CAN ANY NIGHTMARE. ONLY ONE RULE APPLIES: WHAT THE CUSTOMER WANTS, HE GETS.
THE VERY RICH AND VERY POWERFUL LIVE HERE, THEIR ANTI-GRAVITY PALACES EVEN MORE OF A LEGEND THAN THE CITIES...
...AND FIRST AMONG THESE MERCHANT LORDS WHO RULE THE COMMERCE OF AN EMPIRE, IS KYRAS SHAKATI, A MAN WHOSE POWER IS SAID TO RIVAL THAT OF THE EMPEROR HIMSELF!


A MAN WHOSE POWER IS GROUNDED IN THE RAPE AND MURDER OF WORLDS.
SO FAR, SO GOOD.
"SHIP" GOT OUR SKIMMER THROUGH CINNIBAR'S PLANETARY DEFENSES UNDETECTED. FROM HERE ON, IT'S UP TO US.
WATCH YOUR STEP, YOU TWO. IT'S A TWO-MILE FALL IF YOU SLIP.

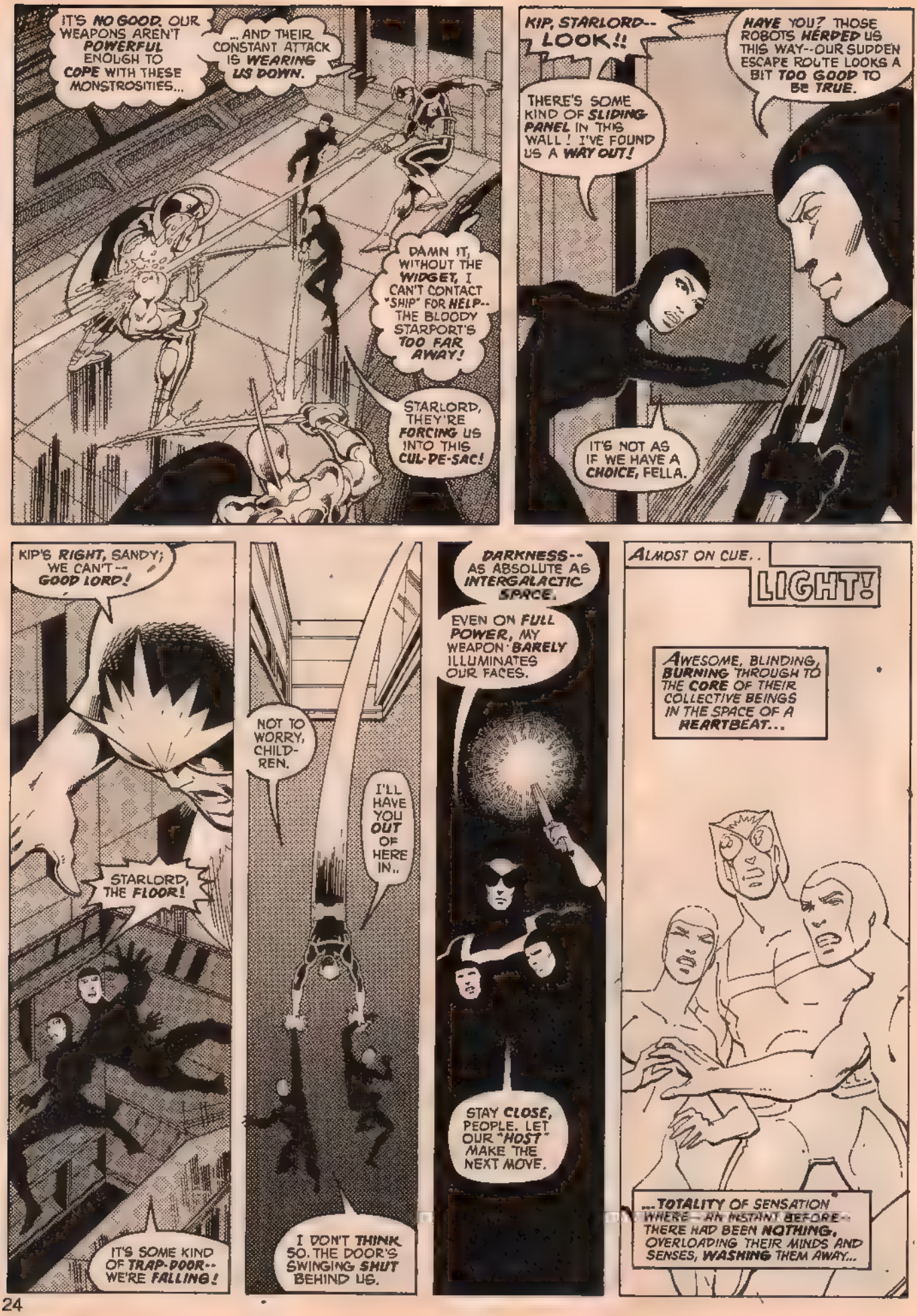
BIO-SCANS INDICATE NO ACTIVE CONTACTS, STARLORD. MOST OF THE IN-HOUSE STAFF REGISTER AS ASLEEP.
GOOD.
KEEP YOUR WIDGET SCANNING, "SHIP". I DON'T WANT ANY SURPRISES.

"UNDERSTOOD.
"BUT TAKE CARE, JUST THE SAME.
"THIS CLOSE TO CINNIBAR'S STARPORT STATION, I DARE NOT USE MY SENSORS FULL STRENGTH.

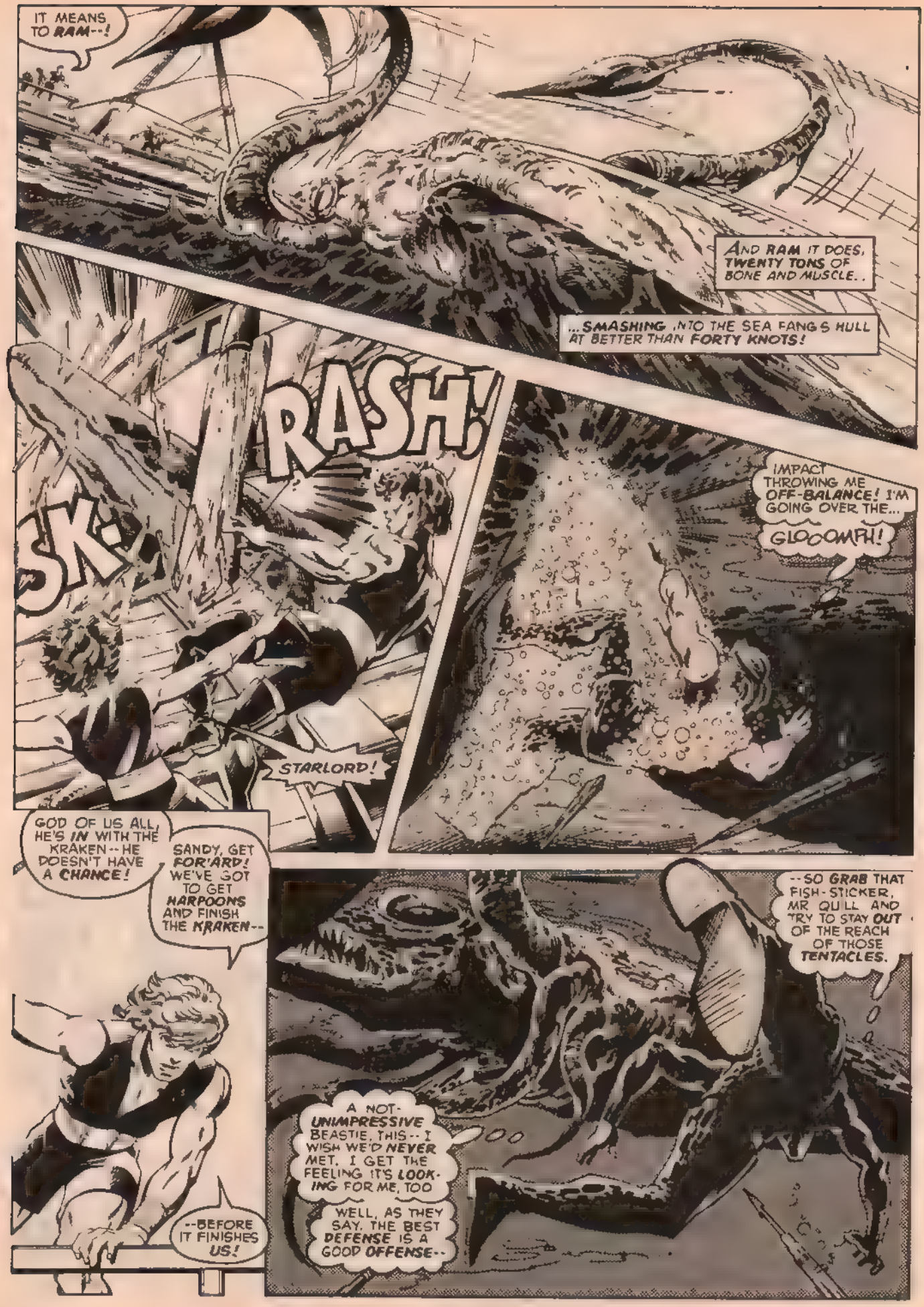
THIS IS CONTROLLED SPACE. I TAKE ONE STEP OUTSIDE IMPERIAL TRANSPORT REGS AND WE'LL HAVE THE IMPERIAL FLEET TO DEAL WITH
I AM BOUND TO YOU, MY FRIEND, YET UNABLE TO MORE THAN WATCH YOU IN MY HOLOGRAM TANK AND GIVE ADVICE.
I COULD WISH FOR ...MORE.


I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL.
KIP, SANDY-- HOLD UP A MINUTE. "SHIP", YOUR WIDGET SEE ANYTHING AHEAD OF US?
NEGATIVE-- THAT IS, NOTHING OVERTLY HOSTILE.
THE COMPUTER CENTER YOU'RE AFTER IS AT THE END OF THIS CORRIDOR.
IS SOMETHING WRONG, STARLORD?

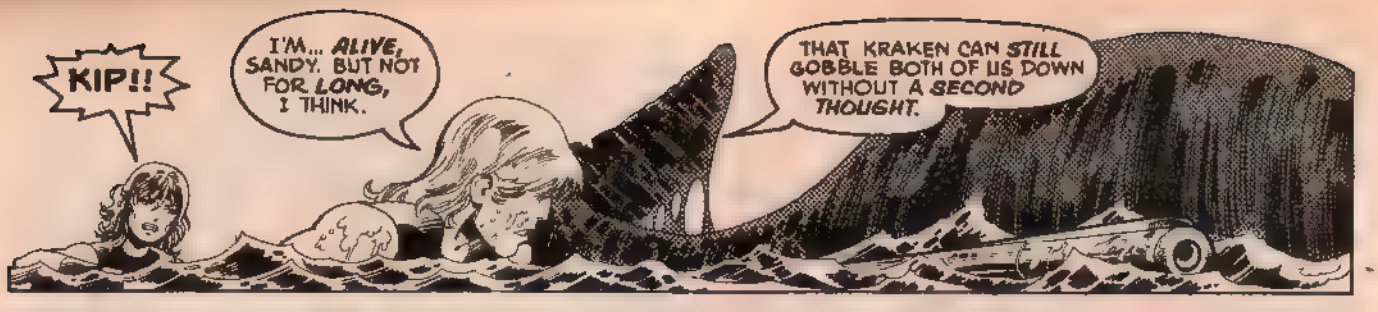
I'M NOT SURE. "SHIP"...?
I SHARE YOUR UNEASINESS. I'M MOVING THE WIDGET IN FOR A CLOSER LOOK AT THESE STA—
AAURRK!
AARRGHH!
THEY--THEY'RE ALIVE! AND STARLORD--YOU'RE HURT!
ONLY MY ARM-- IT'LL... PASS IN TIME. IT'S THE EM...PATHIC RAPPORT I SHARE WITH "SHIP". EACH OF US FEELS THE OTHER'S HURTS..
FOLLOW MY LEAD, YOU TWO! WE'VE GOT TO BLAST THESE ROBOTS BEFORE THEY CAN SUMMON REINFORCEMENTS.
EASIER SAID THAN DONE, STARLORD. FOR THESE ARE FAR MORE THAN MERE ROBOTS--THEY'RE MELYAN CONSTRUCTS, MORE THAN MACHINE, LESS THAN HUMAN, DESIGNED TO BE THE ULTIMATE SOLDIER.
NOTHING LESS THAN A RIFLE BLASTER CAN SLOW THEM DOWN...
...NOTHING LESS THAN ABSOLUTE DESTRUCTION CAN EVEN HOPE TO STOP THEIR SELF-REPAIRING FORMS.
THE THREE INTRUDERS PUT UP A VALIANT FIGHT, DROPPING THEIR GLEAMING FOES TIME AND AGAIN...
...ONLY TO SEE STEEL FLOW LIKE WATER AS THE CONSTRUCTS REFORM THEMSELVES AND RISE, DEADLIER THAN BEFORE.


IT'S NO GOOD. OUR WEAPONS AREN'T POWERFUL ENOUGH TO COPE WITH THESE MONSTROSITIES...
... AND THEIR CONSTANT ATTACK IS WEARING US DOWN.
DAMN IT, WITHOUT THE WIDGET, I CAN'T CONTACT "SHIP" FOR HELP-- THE BLOODY STARPORT'S TOO FAR AWAY!
STARLORD, THEY'RE FORCING US INTO THIS CUL-DE-SAC!
KIP, STARLORD-- LOOK!!
THERE'S SOME KIND OF SLIDING PANEL IN THIS WALL! I'VE FOUND US A WAY OUT!
HAVE YOU? THOSE ROBOTS HERDED US THIS WAY--OUR SUDDEN ESCAPE ROUTE LOOKS A BIT TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.
IT'S NOT AS IF WE HAVE A CHOICE, FELLA.
KIP'S RIGHT, SANDY; WE CAN'T-- GOOD LORD!
STARLORD, THE FLOOR!
IT'S SOME KIND OF TRAP-DOOR-- WE'RE FALLING!
NOT TO WORRY, CHILD-REN.
I'LL HAVE YOU OUT OF HERE IN..
I DON'T THINK SO. THE DOOR'S SWINGING SHUT BEHIND US.
DARKNESS-- AS ABSOLUTE AS INTERGALACTIC SPACE.
EVEN ON FULL POWER, MY WEAPON BARELY ILLUMINATES OUR FACES.
STAY CLOSE, PEOPLE. LET OUR "HOST" MAKE THE NEXT MOVE.
ALMOST ON CUE..
LIGHT!
AWESOME, BLINDING, BURNING THROUGH TO THE CORE OF THEIR COLLECTIVE BEINGS IN THE SPACE OF A HEARTBEAT...
...TOTALITY OF SENSATION WHERE-- AN INSTANT BEFORE-- THERE HAD BEEN NOTHING, OVERLOADING THEIR MINDS AND SENSES, WASHING THEM AWAY...

... AND THEN WASHING THEM BACK AGAIN.
SOMEWHERE ELSE.
I I CAN SEE!
STARLORD, WHAT HAPPENED?! WHERE ARE WE?!?
HOME!
WE'RE HOME, MY HOME! THIS IS MY PARENTS' SHIP, THE SEA FANG!
I'M GOING MAD, I MUST BE. WINDHOLME'S HUNDREDS OF PARSECS AWAY. THIS SHIP WAS DESTROYED, MY PARENTS KILLED BEFORE MY EYES!
I SAW THEM DIE!!
IF YOU'RE MAD, SON, IT'S A MADNESS WE ALL SHARE. BECAUSE I SEE IT, TOO. SO DOES SANDY.
IT'S SO . REAL! SIGHT, SOUND, SMELL, TOUCH -- ALL MY SENSES TELL ME THIS EXISTS!
LORD OF THE DEEP.
A MILE AWAY, THE OCEAN ERUPTS UNDER ONE OF THE SEA FANG'S SKIFFS, AND A KING KRAKEN -- INTELLIGENT RULER OF WINDHOLME'S OCEANS -- BREAKS SURFACE.
THE MEN ABOARD THE SKIFF DON'T EVEN HAVE TIME TO SCREAM.
BUT THAT'S THE WAY OF THINGS ON WINDHOLME. THE SCANIA HUNT THE KRAKEN, THE KRAKEN HUNT THE SCANIA, BOTH SIDES COMING OUT ABOUT EVEN.
AND, SOME SAY, ENJOYING EVERY MINUTE OF IT.
THIS IS REAL! THIS -- HAPPENED!
BUT NOW -- THE KRAKEN'S CHARGING US!
STARLORD, A MONTH AGO, A KING KRAKEN -- THE BIGGEST I'D EVER SEEN -- ATTACKED SEA FANG'S BOATS. IT COULD HAVE KILLED US ALL, BUT CHOSE NOT TO.


IT MEANS TO RAM--!
AND RAM IT DOES, TWENTY TONS OF BONE AND MUSCLE..
...SMASHING INTO THE SEA FANG'S HULL AT BETTER THAN FORTY KNOTS!
SKR-
RASH!
STARLORD!
IMPACT THROWING ME OFF-BALANCE! I'M GOING OVER THE...
GLOOOMPH!
GOD OF US ALL, HE'S IN WITH THE KRAKEN--HE DOESN'T HAVE A CHANCE!
SANDY, GET FOR'ARD! WE'VE GOT TO GET HARPOONS AND FINISH THE KRAKEN--
--BEFORE IT FINISHES US!
A NOT-UNIMPRESSIVE BEASTIE, THIS-- I WISH WE'D NEVER MET. I GET THE FEELING IT'S LOOKING FOR ME, TOO
WELL, AS THEY SAY, THE BEST DEFENSE IS A GOOD OFFENSE--
--SO GRAB THAT FISH-STICKER, MR QUILL AND TRY TO STAY OUT OF THE REACH OF THOSE TENTACLES.

GOT IT!
NOW TO MOVE IN CLOSE BEFORE MY AIR RUNS OUT--
--LUNGS ALREADY STARTING TO BURN...
DAMN! I WAS TOO SLOW--!
FEEL LIKE I'M IN A VISE--KRAKEN'S CRUSHING LIFE OUT OF ME...
WELL, BUSTER, PETER QUILL NEVER DIES EASILY--AND THAT GOES DOUBLE FOR STARLORD!
THE SPEAR STABS DEEP INTO THE KRAKEN'S EYE AND BRAIN; ITS REACTION IS IMMEDIATE, INSTINCTIVE... DEADLY...
FATHER! THE KRAKEN'S GOING CRAZY!
ITS DEATH-AGONIES, LAD. THE BEAST IS FINISHED, ONLY IT DOESN'T KNOW IT YET...
AWAY WITH YOU, KIP!
Huh--?!?
A MOMENT LATER, IT'S ALL OVER AS THE KRAKEN ARCHES ITS FULL LENGTH OUT OF THE WATER, TWISTING IN MID-AIR, FALLING, ITS MASSIVE TAIL DESCENDING LIKE SOME MONSTROUS, UNSTOPPABLE HAMMER...
...AND ONCE AGAIN, KIP HÖLM WATCHES HIS PARENTS DIE.
FATHER! MOTHER!!


KIP!!
I'M... ALIVE, SANDY. BUT NOT FOR LONG, I THINK.
THAT KRAKEN CAN STILL GOBBLE BOTH OF US DOWN WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT.

COME ON, THEN, MONSTER! WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?!?
YOU'LL FIND GUNNAR HOLM'S SON READY TO DIE FIGHTING!

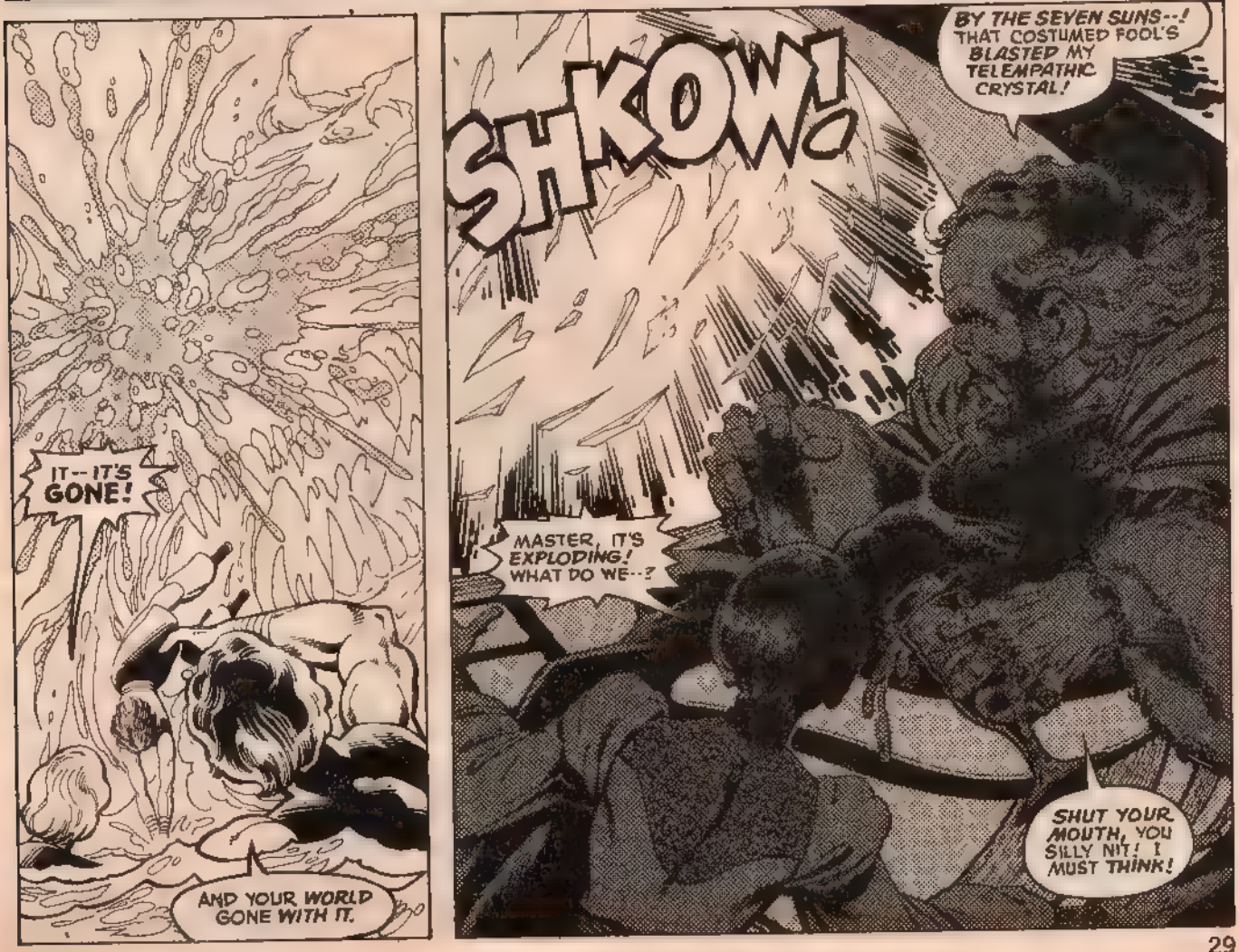
AIR!
I WAS BEGINNING TO WONDER IF I'D EVER BREATHE IT AGAIN.
STARLORD!

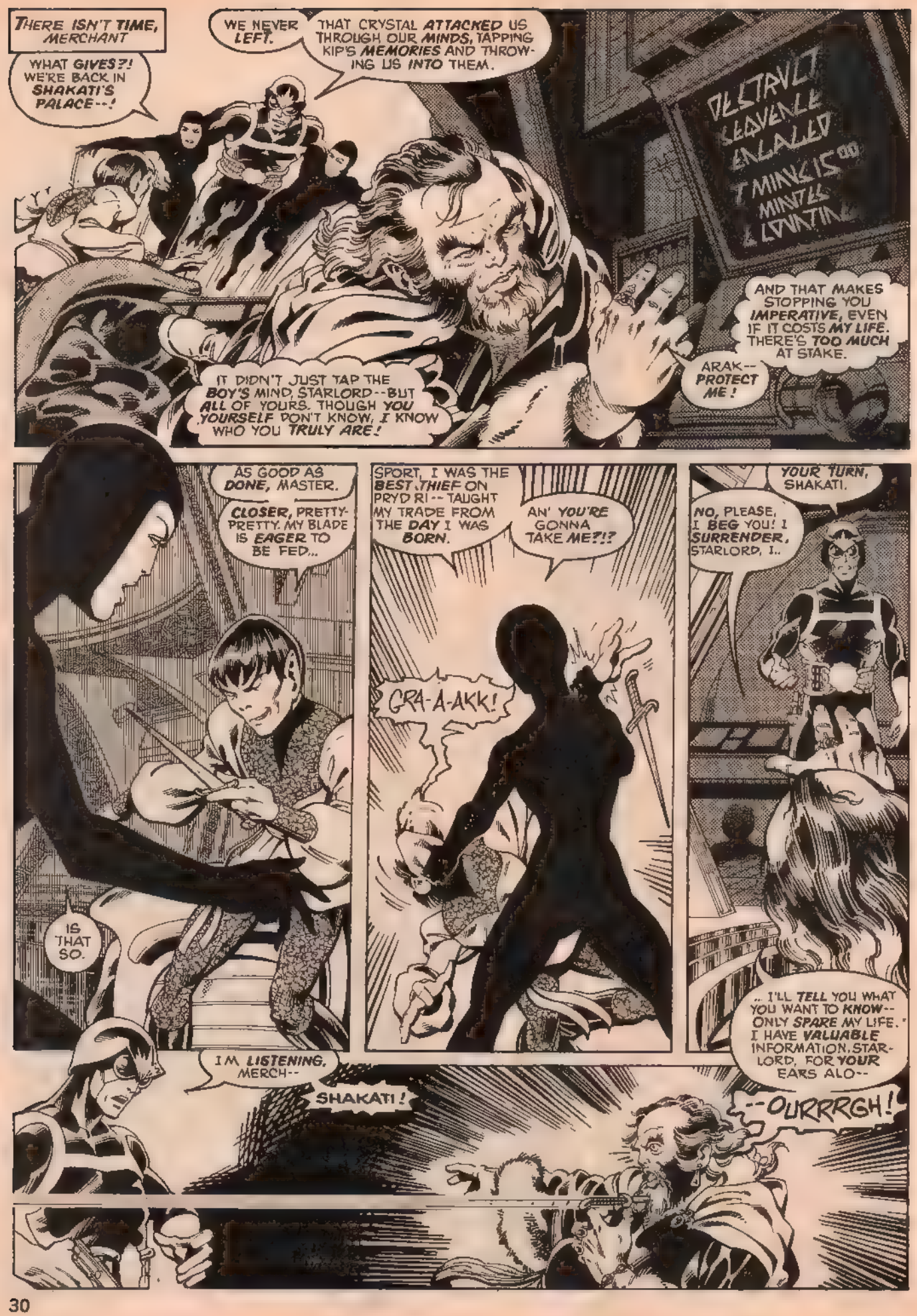
LORD OF THE DEEP, IT WAS YOU WHO HARPOONED THE KRAKEN--FROM UNDERWATER?!? THAT WAS... WAS,
..MAGNIFICENT..
STARLORD... YOUR EYES?!?

WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY EYES, KIP?
I'LL BE DAMNED.

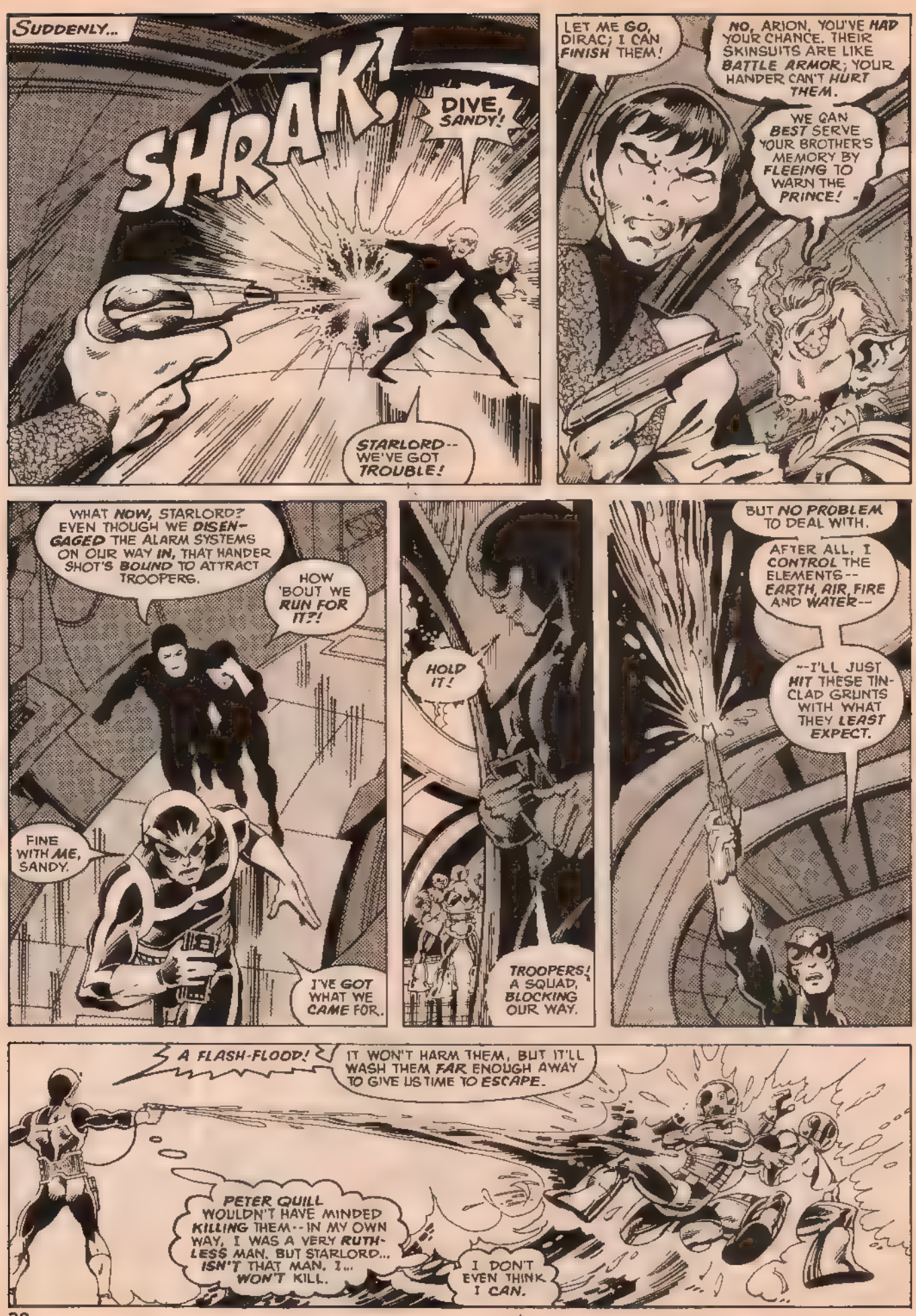
IMAGES... BLENDING AND CHANGING BEFORE STARLORD'S EYES-- ONE SHOWING KIP AND SANDY (AND HIMSELF) ADRIFT ON A WINDHOLME SEA...
THE OTHER SHOWING THEM STANDING ALONE BENEATH A GLEAMING, MULTI-FACETED CRYSTAL. BUT WHICH IMAGE IS...
ILLUSION?

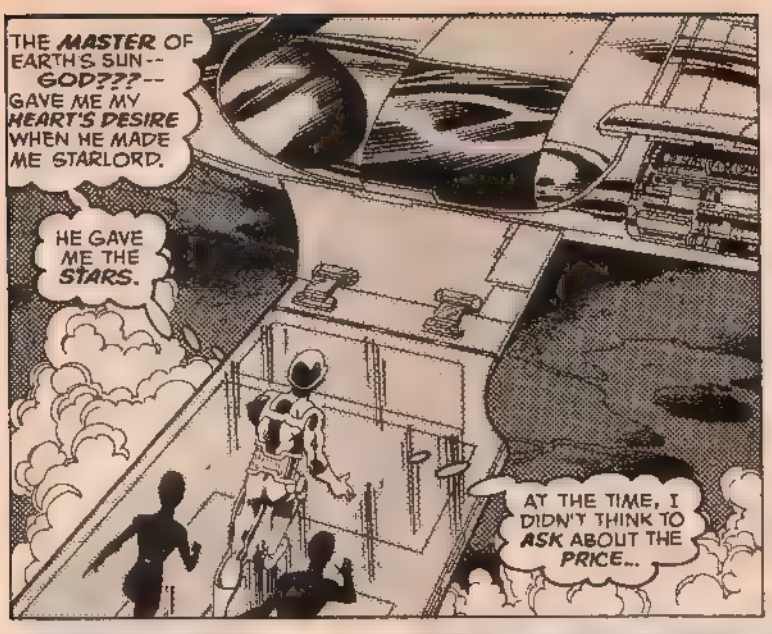
PART OF HIM TELLS HIM HE'S HOLDING EMPTY AIR...
STARLORD --THE KRAKEN!!
...PART SAYS HE'S HOLDING HIS WEAPON.
BUT WHICH IS TRUTH?!? THERE'S NO TIME FOR DOUBTS-- AND YET, HIS SENSES SCREAM THE SEA-BEAST IS REAL.
KIP, STARLORD-- HELP ME! PLEASE!!
IF HE'S GUESSED WRONG, THEY'RE DEAD.


IT-- IT'S GONE!
AND YOUR WORLD GONE WITH IT.
SHKOW!
BY THE SEVEN SUNS--! THAT COSTUMED FOOL'S BLASTED MY TELEMPATHIC CRYSTAL!
MASTER, IT'S EXPLODING! WHAT DO WE--?
SHUT YOUR MOUTH, YOU SILLY NIT! I MUST THINK!

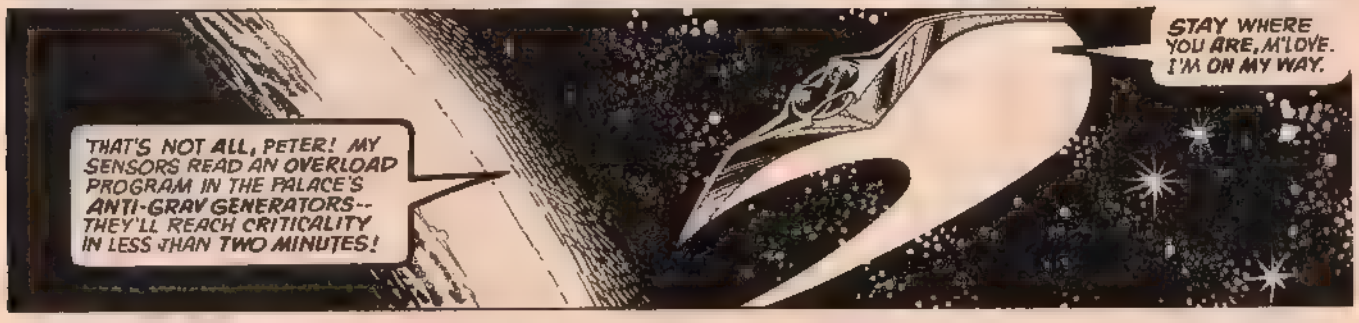

THERE ISN'T TIME, MERCHANT
WHAT GIVES?! WE'RE BACK IN SHAKATI'S PALACE--!
WE NEVER LEFT.
THAT CRYSTAL ATTACKED US THROUGH OUR MINDS, TAPPING KIP'S MEMORIES AND THROWING US INTO THEM.
IT DIDN'T JUST TAP THE BOY'S MIND, STARLORD--BUT ALL OF YOURS. THOUGH YOU YOURSELF DON'T KNOW, I KNOW WHO YOU TRULY ARE!
ARAK--PROTECT ME!
AND THAT MAKES STOPPING YOU IMPERATIVE, EVEN IF IT COSTS MY LIFE. THERE'S TOO MUCH AT STAKE.
AS GOOD AS DONE, MASTER.
CLOSER, PRETTY-PRETTY. MY BLADE IS EAGER TO BE FED...
IS THAT SO.
SPORT, I WAS THE BEST THIEF ON PRYD RI--TAUGHT MY TRADE FROM THE DAY I WAS BORN.
AN' YOU'RE GONNA TAKE ME?!?
GRA-A-AKK!
YOUR TURN, SHAKATI.
NO, PLEASE, I BEG YOU! I SURRENDER, STARLORD, I..
I'M LISTENING, MERCH--
SHAKATI!
.. I'LL TELL YOU WHAT YOU WANT TO KNOW--ONLY SPARE MY LIFE. I HAVE VALUABLE INFORMATION, STARLORD, FOR YOUR EARS ALO--
--OURRRGH!

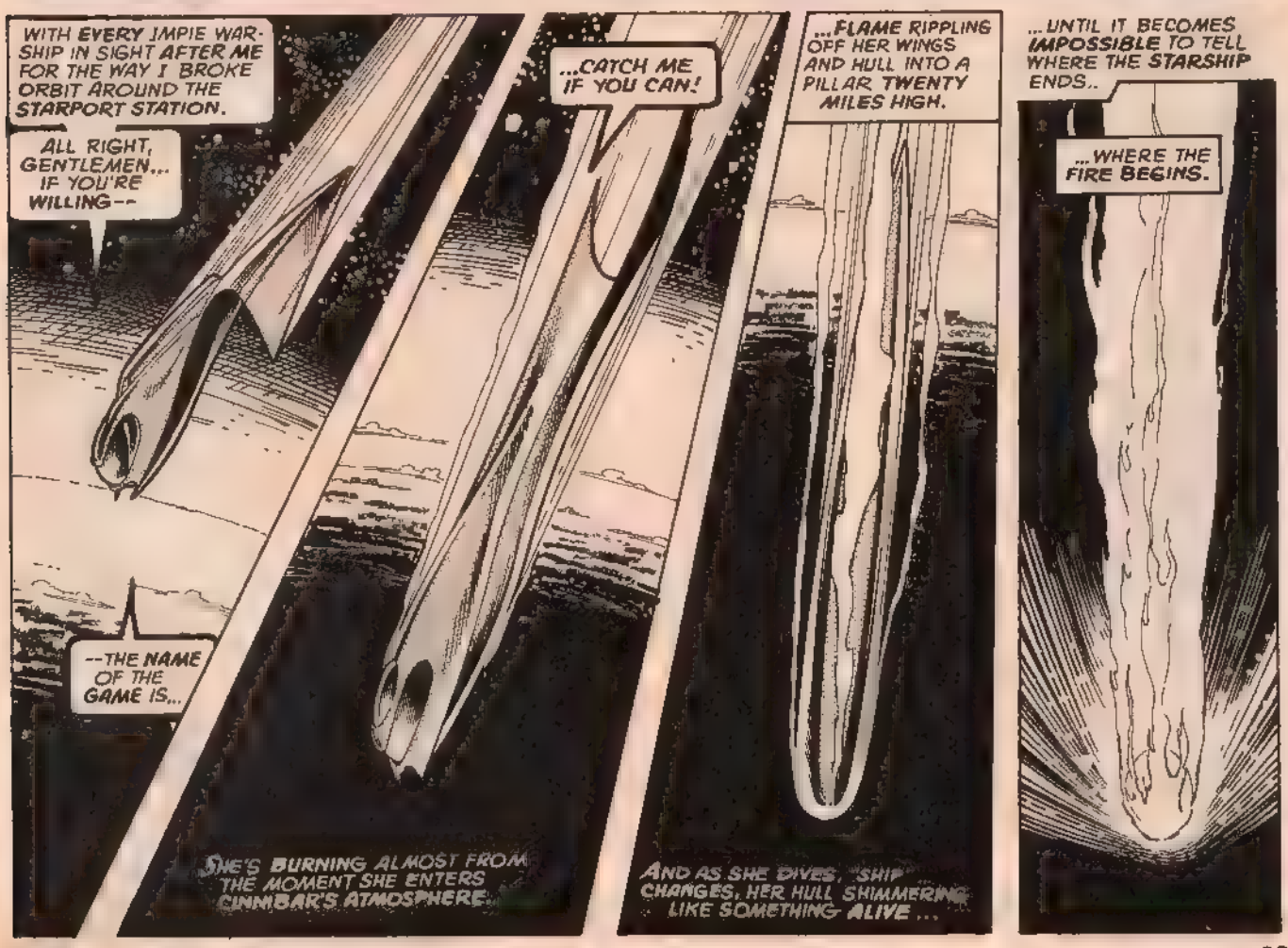
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING AT, SANDY?! HE HAD INFORMATION WE NEEDED!
HE HAD A FINGER BLASTER-- AN ORGANIC IMPLANT-- AIMED AT YOUR HEART! THEY WERE ALL THE RAGE ON PRYD'RI.
ANOTHER STEP AND HE'D'VE CUT YOU IN HALF!
HE WOULD HAVE TRIED.
BUT WHAT'S DONE IS DONE. I'LL SCAN HIS COMPUTER BANKS...
YOU TWO STAY. CLOSE BY.
HIS FINGERS MOVE QUICKLY, SURELY, OVER THE ALIEN CONSOLES, ONE TOUCH TELLING HIM ALL HE NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT THEIR OPERATION..
...PART OF THE LEGACY OF BEING STAR-LORD, MASTERY OF LANGUAGES, OF ALL THINGS MECHANICAL, OF THE ELEMENTS OF LIFE.
SOMETIMES, HE WISHES HE'D REMAINED PETER QUILL.
SANDY...?
I'D... LIKE TO HELP?
YOU CAN'T, SPORT. YOU DON'T KNOW ME AT ALL. OR MY LIFE. CHRISTOS, A RUBE LIKE YOU WOULDN'T LAST TEN SECONDS WHERE I GREW UP
WE'RE NOTHING ALIKE, YOU AND I.
I'M HUMAN, SANDY. JUST LIKE YOU. I'VE LIVED. I'VE LOST. I'VE FOUGHT. I'VE KILLED. I'VE HATED.
I LOVE. YOU.
THE DETAILS DON'T MATTER.
I GUESS... THEY DON'T, AT THAT.

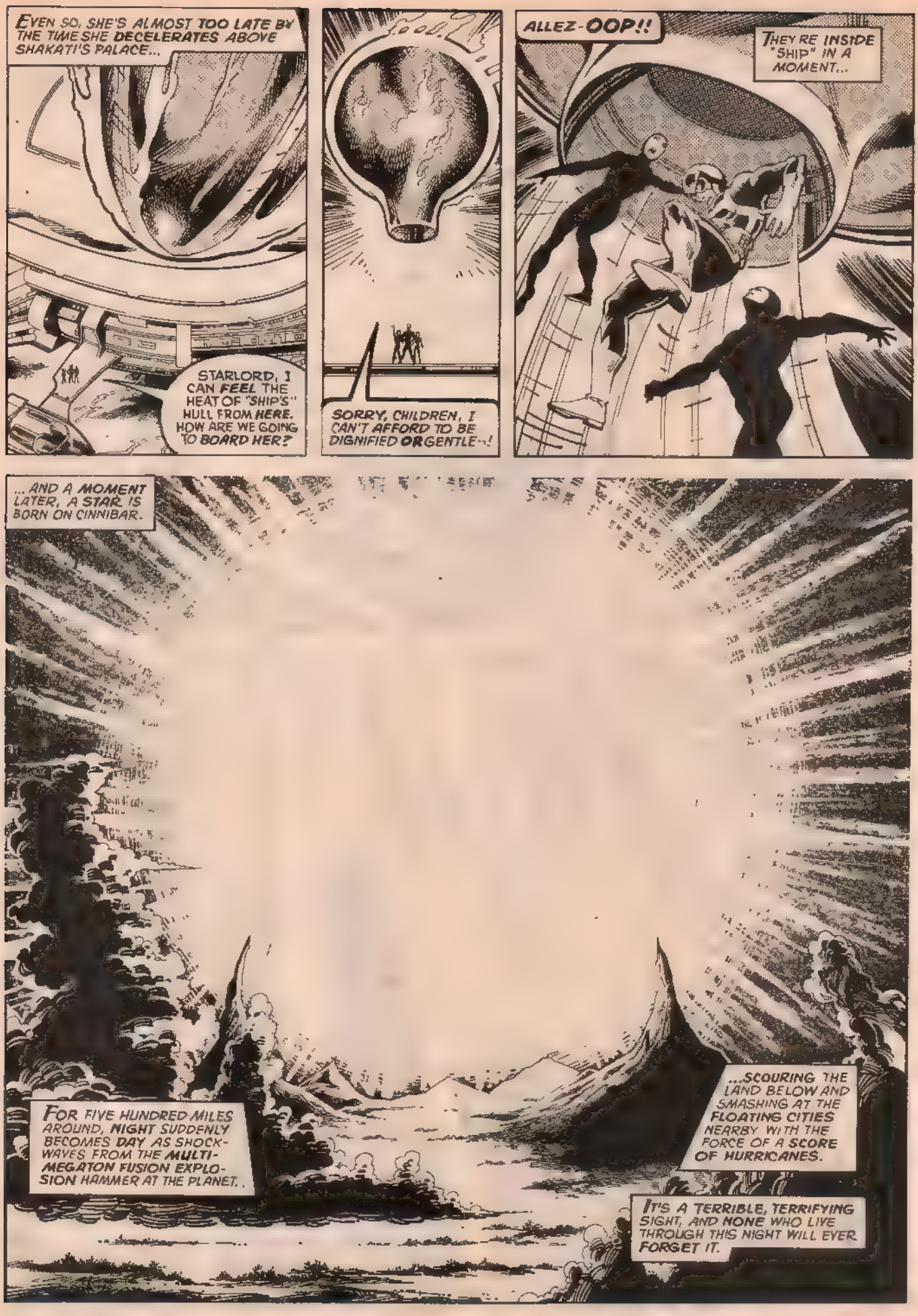

SUDDENLY...
SHRAK!
DIVE, SANDY!
STARLORD-- WE'VE GOT TROUBLE!
LET ME GO, DIRAC; I CAN FINISH THEM!
NO, ARION, YOU'VE HAD YOUR CHANCE. THEIR SKINSUITS ARE LIKE BATTLE ARMOR; YOUR HANDER CAN'T HURT THEM.
WE CAN BEST SERVE YOUR BROTHER'S MEMORY BY FLEEING TO WARN THE PRINCE!
WHAT NOW, STARLORD? EVEN THOUGH WE DISENGAGED THE ALARM SYSTEMS ON OUR WAY IN, THAT HANDER SHOT'S BOUND TO ATTRACT TROOPERS.
HOW 'BOUT WE RUN FOR IT?!
FINE WITH ME, SANDY.
I'VE GOT WHAT WE CAME FOR.
HOLD IT!
TROOPERS! A SQUAD, BLOCKING OUR WAY.
BUT NO PROBLEM TO DEAL WITH.
AFTER ALL, I CONTROL THE ELEMENTS-- EARTH, AIR, FIRE AND WATER--
--I'LL JUST HIT THESE TIN-CLAD GRUNTS WITH WHAT THEY LEAST EXPECT.
A FLASH-FLOOD!
IT WON'T HARM THEM, BUT IT'LL WASH THEM FAR ENOUGH AWAY TO GIVE US TIME TO ESCAPE.
PETER QUILL WOULDN'T HAVE MINDED KILLING THEM-- IN MY OWN WAY, I WAS A VERY RUTHLESS MAN. BUT STARLORD... ISN'T THAT MAN. I... WON'T KILL.
I DON'T EVEN THINK I CAN.


THE MASTER OF EARTH'S SUN-- GOD???-- GAVE ME MY HEART'S DESIRE WHEN HE MADE ME STARLORD.
HE GAVE ME THE STARS.
AT THE TIME, I DIDN'T THINK TO ASK ABOUT THE PRICE...

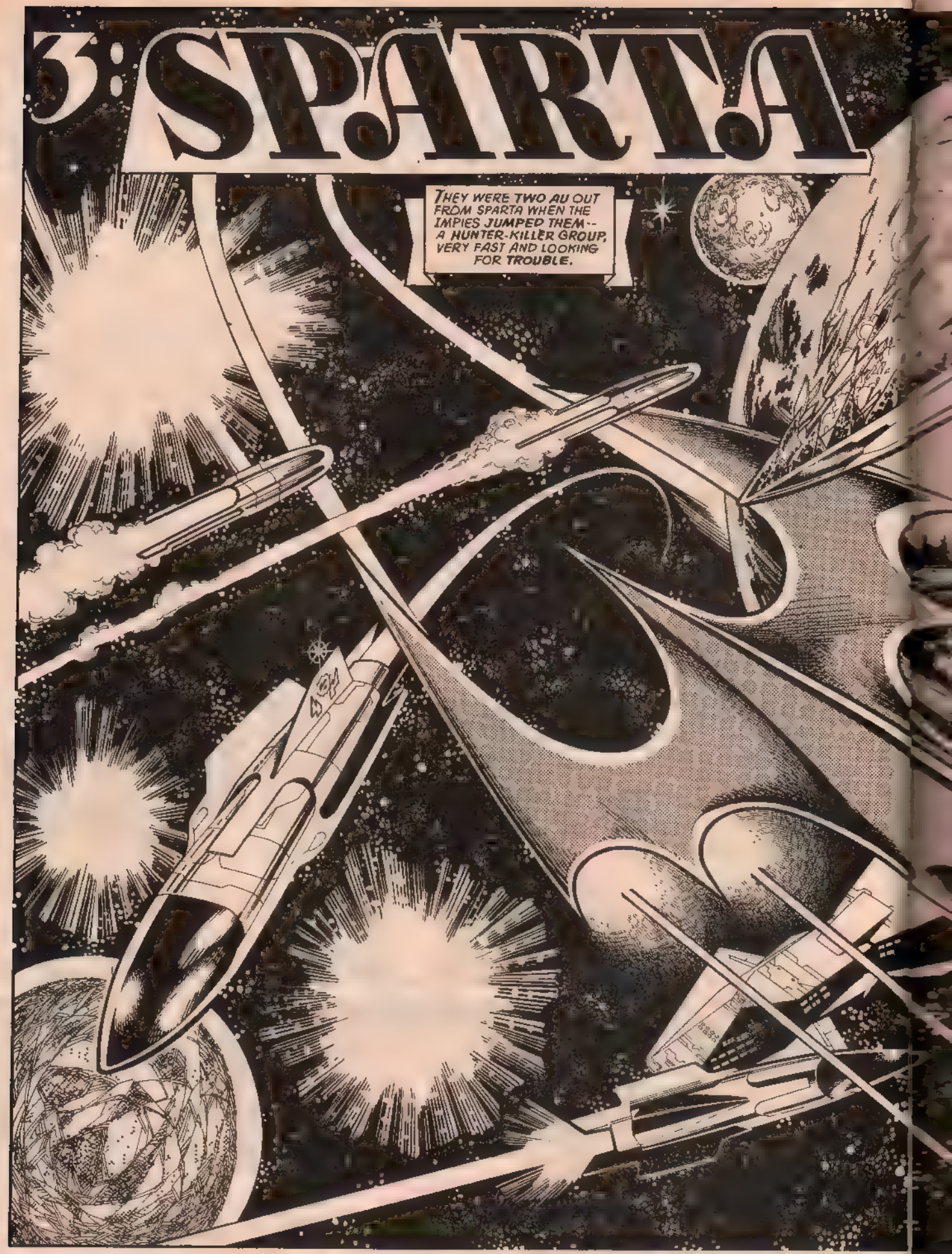
ALL ABOARD, TROOPS, AND WE'LL BE ON OUR...
NO!!
SKIMMER'S... BOOBY-TRAPPED. EN...GAGE THE--SQUWARRRK-- DRIVE AND THE CRAFT... VAPORIZES!


THAT'S NOT ALL, PETER! MY SENSORS READ AN OVERLOAD PROGRAM IN THE PALACE'S ANTI-GRAV GENERATORS-- THEY'LL REACH CRITICALITY IN LESS THAN TWO MINUTES!
STAY WHERE YOU ARE, M'LOVE. I'M ON MY WAY.

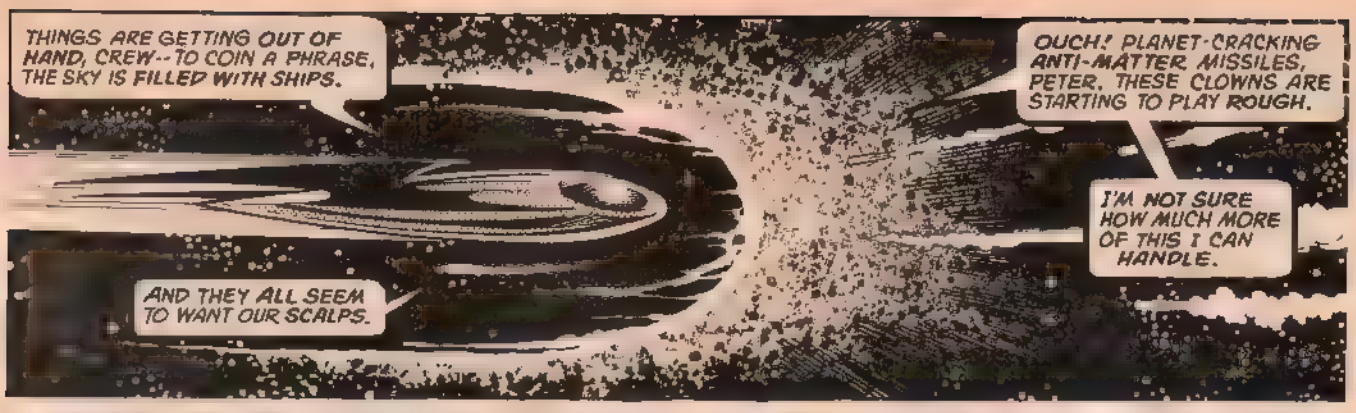

WITH EVERY IMPIE WAR-SHIP IN SIGHT AFTER ME FOR THE WAY I BROKE ORBIT AROUND THE STARPORT STATION.
ALL RIGHT, GENTLEMEN... IF YOU'RE WILLING--
--THE NAME OF THE GAME IS...
...CATCH ME IF YOU CAN!
SHE'S BURNING ALMOST FROM THE MOMENT SHE ENTERS CINNABAR'S ATMOSPHERE.
...FLAME RIPPLING OFF HER WINGS AND HULL INTO A PILLAR TWENTY MILES HIGH.
AND AS SHE DIVES, SHIP CHANGES, HER HULL SHIMMERING LIKE SOMETHING ALIVE ...
...UNTIL IT BECOMES IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL WHERE THE STARSHIP ENDS..
...WHERE THE FIRE BEGINS.


EVEN SO, SHE'S ALMOST TOO LATE BY THE TIME SHE DECELERATES ABOVE SHAKATI'S PALACE...
STARLORD, I CAN FEEL THE HEAT OF "SHIP'S" HULL FROM HERE. HOW ARE WE GOING TO BOARD HER?
SORRY, CHILDREN, I CAN'T AFFORD TO BE DIGNIFIED OR GENTLE--!
ALLEZ-OOP!!
THEY'RE INSIDE "SHIP" IN A MOMENT...
...AND A MOMENT LATER, A STAR IS BORN ON CINNIBAR.
FOR FIVE HUNDRED MILES AROUND, NIGHT SUDDENLY BECOMES DAY AS SHOCK-WAVES FROM THE MULTI-MEGATON FUSION EXPLO-SION HAMMER AT THE PLANET..
...SCOURING THE LAND BELOW AND SMASHING AT THE FLOATING CITIES NEARBY WITH THE FORCE OF A SCORE OF HURRICANES.
IT'S A TERRIBLE, TERRIFYING SIGHT, AND NONE WHO LIVE THROUGH THIS NIGHT WILL EVER FORGET IT.

IMAGINE THEN, WHAT IT MUST BE LIKE TO BE AT THE CENTER OF THAT NIGHTMARE...
.. AND SURVIVE.
SANDY SPEAKS FIRST, AFTER WHAT SEEMS LIKE AN ETERNITY OF SILENCE, IN A VOICE SO SMALL SHE CAN BARELY HEAR IT.
S-STARLORD.. ?
IT'S BEAUTIFUL, ISN'T IT? ALMOST LIKE SEEING CREATION.
AND YET... THE HEART OF A STAR IS MORE BEAUTIFUL.
I LOOK AT THIS, AT ALL THE WONDERS-- DISCOVERED AND YET UNKNOWN -- THE UNIVERSE HAS TO OFFER...
. AND I CRY INSIDE AT HOW EASILY-- HOW CASUALLY-- WE DESTROY THEM WITH OUR WARS.
I -WE- DON'T UNDER-STAND.
NOR DO I, REALLY. THAT'S PART OF WHY I'M STARLORD. BECAUSE MY NEED TO KNOW OUT-WEIGHS MY DESIRE TO KILL.
I MAY NEVER FIND THE ANSWERS, BUT I'LL NEVER STOP SEARCHING FOR THEM, EITHER.
SPEAKING OF ANSWERS, IT SEEMS OUR ANTI-SLAVER CRUSADE HAS BECOME SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT!
LET'S GET OUT OF HERE, "SHIP".
WE'RE OFF TO SAVE AN EMPIRE!
THE PROFITS MADE OFF THE STRIPPED WORLDS ARE BEING USED TO FINANCE A COUP-D'ETAT...
..THAT AIMS TO REPLACE YOUR EMPEROR WITH HIS UNCLE, PRINCE GARETH!


3: SPARTA
THEY WERE TWO AU OUT FROM SPARTA WHEN THE IMPIES JUMPED THEM -- A HUNTER-KILLER GROUP, VERY FAST AND LOOKING FOR TROUBLE.

LOOKING FOR "SHIP" AND IN NO MOOD TO TALK.
THE ODDS WERE LOUSY AND GETTING WORSE BY THE MINUTE AS THE RUNNING FIGHT CLOSED ON SPARTA, THE TASK FORCE COMMANDER THROWING EVERYTHING HE HAD AT "SHIP" (STARFIGHTERS, DESTROYERS, FRIGATES, EVEN A FAST BATTLE-CRUISER) IN A LAST-DITCH ATTEMPT TO PREVENT HER REACHING THE IMPERIAL HOMEWORLD.

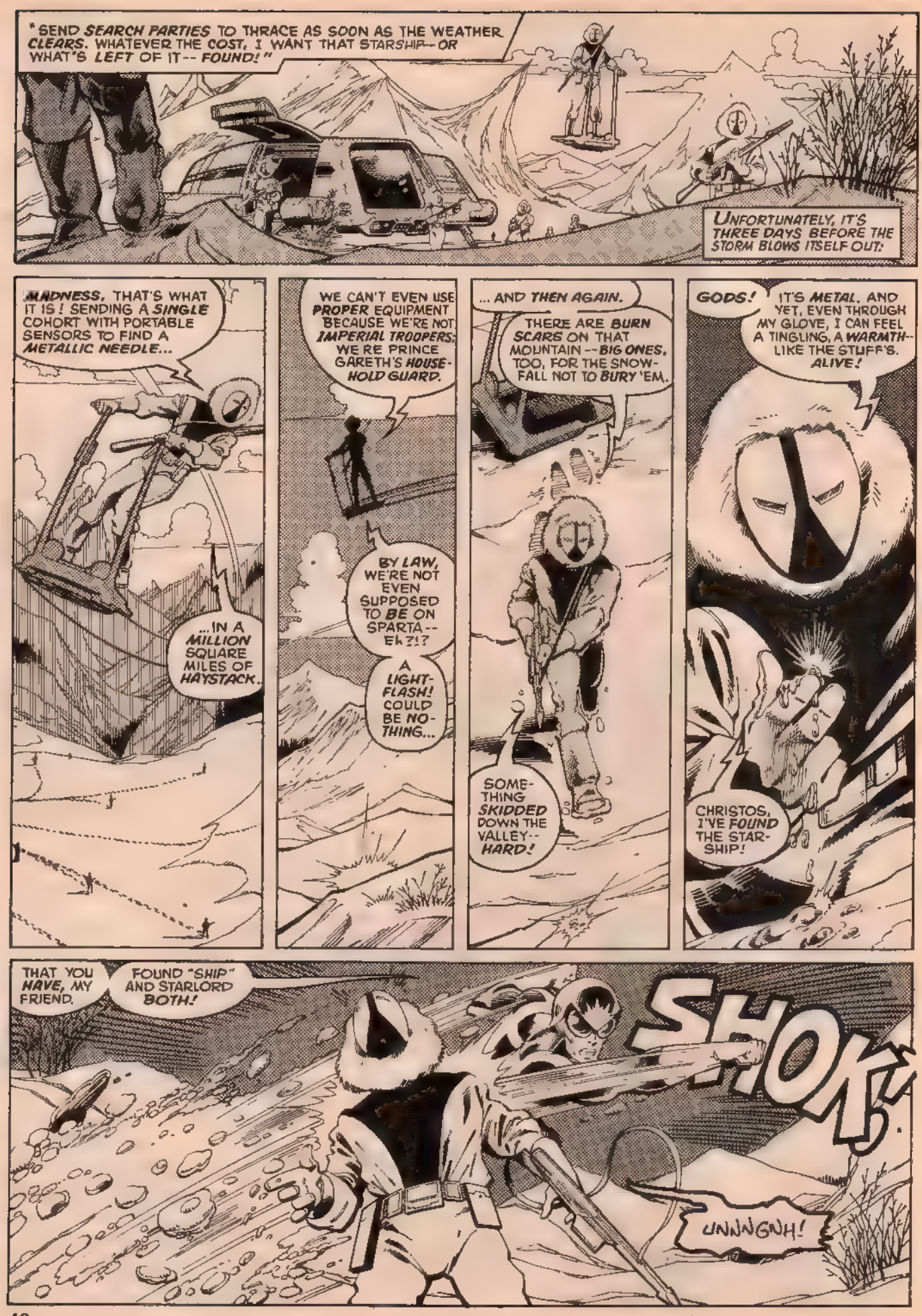

THINGS ARE GETTING OUT OF HAND, CREW--TO COIN A PHRASE, THE SKY IS FILLED WITH SHIPS.
AND THEY ALL SEEM TO WANT OUR SCALPS.
OUCH! PLANET-CRACKING ANTI-MATTER MISSILES, PETER. THESE CLOWNS ARE STARTING TO PLAY ROUGH.
I'M NOT SURE HOW MUCH MORE OF THIS I CAN HANDLE.

STARLORD, CAN'T WE SIMPLY EXPLAIN WHY WE'RE HERE?
AFTER WHAT HAPPENED ON CINNIBAR, KIP, I DOUBT ANYONE WOULD LISTEN.
BESIDES, HOW DO WE KNOW THE FLEET COMMANDER ISN'T IN ON THE TAKE-OVER?
LIKE IT OR NOT, OUR INFORMATION IS FOR THE EMPEROR'S EARS. OR NO ONE'S.

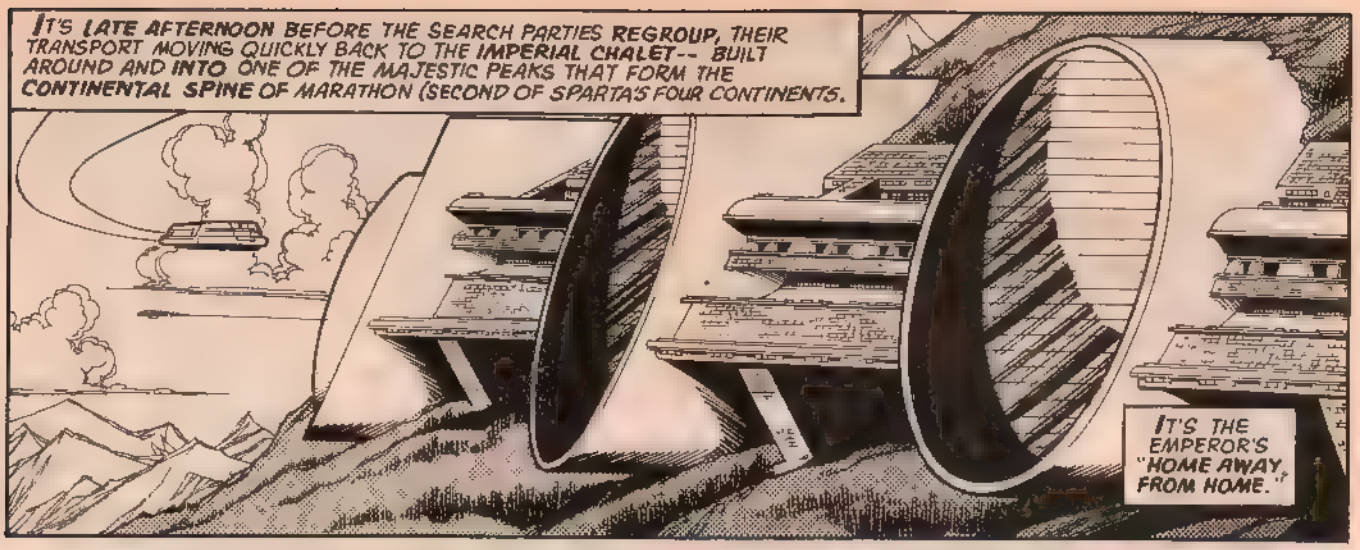
AT THE MOMENT, STARLORD, IT LOOKS LIKE "NO ONE'S"...
GOT HER!
GYPSY 4 TO LEADER--A DIRECT HIT! MY LASER CANNONS CUT HER WIDE OPEN!
PETER!!

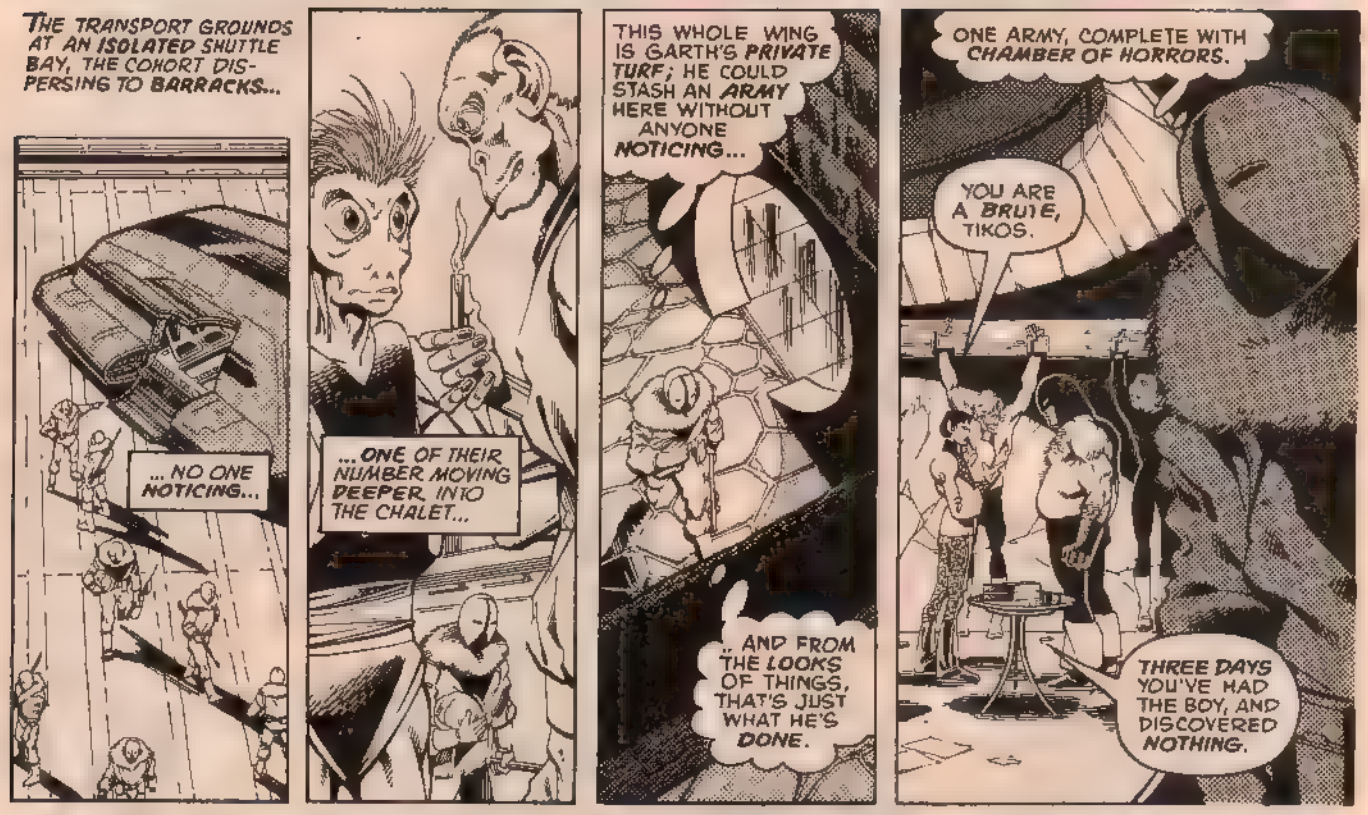
ARRRGH
STARLORD!
AGONY! SO PRIMAL THAT IT DEFIES COMPREHENSION, SEARING HIS MIND AND BODY LIKE AN EXPLODING STAR...
...SHRIVELING HIM-- TIL HE CAN'T THINK, CAN'T MOVE, CAN'T DO ANYTHING BUT ENDURE...
...AS "SHIP" MUST ENDURE.

STARLORD, WHAT CAN WE DO? IF "SHIP'S" DAMAGED, WE CAN...
N-NOTHING... YOU CAN DO. SHE... ISN'T A MA... CHINE... SHE'S... ALIVE...
N-NOT D-DAMAGED IN... N-NORMAL SENSE. SHE'S WA-WOUNDED. I THINK, MORTALLY.
GOT TO GET YOU-- SANDY-- OUT!
WE'RE NOT LEAVING YOU, STARLORD. WE'VE COME THIS FAR; WE'LL STAY 'TIL THE END.
THIS... IS THE END.
LIFEBOAT'LL DROP YOU ON SPARTA.
WITH LUCK, YOU'LL STILL BE ABLE TO WARN YOUR EMPEROR.
TO HELL WITH HIM. IT'S YOU I-- UNNNGNH-
NO MORE ARGUMENTS, SANDY.
THANK HER FOR ME WHEN SHE WAKES, KIP. TELL HER I'M SORRY I DECKED HER.
GOOD LUCK, LAD.
STAR-LORD, I ..
NO! I WON'T SAY FAREWELL. BECAUSE WE'LL MEET AGAIN!
"SURE WE WILL, KIP."
AN INSTANT LATER, THE LIFEBOAT BLASTS FREE...
LEAVING "SHIP" TO TUMBLE HEADLONG INTO SPARTA'S ATMOSPHERE, OUT OF CONTROL, DYING...
THERE'S A MADCAP BLIZZARD OVER THRACE HIGHNESS. WE'RE LOSING THE INTRUDER.
STILL HAVE A HARD CONTACT ON THE LIFE-BOAT, THOUGH
FOLLOW IT DOWN. I WANT THE OCCUPANTS TAKEN ALIVE FOR QUESTIONING.
MY NEPHEW -- THE EMPEROR -- WILL OF COURSE BE TOLD THAT THERE WERE NO SURVIVORS. FOR HIM, THE INCIDENT WILL BE CLOSED.


"SEND SEARCH PARTIES TO THRACE AS SOON AS THE WEATHER CLEARS. WHATEVER THE COST, I WANT THAT STARSHIP-- OR WHAT'S LEFT OF IT-- FOUND!"
UNFORTUNATELY, IT'S THREE DAYS BEFORE THE STORM BLOWS ITSELF OUT.
MADNESS, THAT'S WHAT IT IS! SENDING A SINGLE COHORT WITH PORTABLE SENSORS TO FIND A METALLIC NEEDLE...
...IN A MILLION SQUARE MILES OF HAYSTACK.
WE CAN'T EVEN USE PROPER EQUIPMENT BECAUSE WE'RE NOT IMPERIAL TROOPERS; WE'RE PRINCE GARETH'S HOUSEHOLD GUARD.
BY LAW, WE'RE NOT EVEN SUPPOSED TO BE ON SPARTA-- EH?!?
A LIGHT-FLASH! COULD BE NOTHING...
...AND THEN AGAIN.
THERE ARE BURN SCARS ON THAT MOUNTAIN--BIG ONES, TOO, FOR THE SNOWFALL NOT TO BURY 'EM.
SOMETHING SKIDDED DOWN THE VALLEY-- HARD!
GODS! IT'S METAL. AND YET, EVEN THROUGH MY GLOVE, I CAN FEEL A TINGLING, A WARMTH-- LIKE THE STUFF'S ALIVE!
CHRISTOS, I'VE FOUND THE STARSHIP!
THAT YOU HAVE, MY FRIEND.
FOUND "SHIP" AND STARLORD BOTH!
SHOK!
UNNNGNH!

OUR WAITING GAME PAID OFF, "SHIP"; I'VE GOT US A PRISONER--AN OFFICER, BY HIS INSIGNIA.
HOW'RE YOU FEELING?
I'VE FELT BETTER, THANK YOU. BUT I THINK I'LL LIVE.
WE GOT LUCKY, Y'KNOW I MAY BE THE DEADLIEST SHIP IN SPACE...
...BUT EVEN I HAVE MY LIMITS.
WHAT ARE MINE, "SHIP"?
THAT'S FOR YOU TO DISCOVER, PETER. YOU'RE STARLORD, REMEMBER? I'M ONLY YOUR COMPANION.
YOU'RE MY FRIEND. SOMETHING THAT PETER QUILL NEVER HAD.
UM.
OKAY, YOUR HYPNO-PROBE'S IN PLACE. WHAT DO I DO NOW?
WAIT FOR ME TO NEUTRALIZE HIS MIND SHIELDS.
THERE. HE'S ALL YOURS, PETER. ASK HIM WHAT YOU WILL; HE'LL ANSWER TRUTHFULLY.
AND SO IT GOES, THROUGH A LONG HOUR OF INTERROGATION AS THE OFFICER CALMLY OUTLINES THE PLANNED COUP-D'ETAT, UNTIL...
A FINAL QUESTION: TWO YOUNG PEOPLE IN A LIFEBOAT, SHOT FREE AS I CRASHED. WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM?
CAPTURED, O'COURSE. PRINCE GARETH HAS 'EM AT THE CHALET. BEEN WORKIN ON THE BOY FOR THREE DAYS, BUT HE WEREN'T TALKIN'...
LATER...
IT'S MY FAULT, "SHIP", I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED...
IT WOULDN'T HAVE CHANGED ANYTHING YOU AND I ALONE BARELY SURVIVED PLANET-FALL; KIP AND SANDY WOULD HAVE DIED.
AT LEAST THIS WAY THEY'RE STILL ALIVE FOR YOU TO RESCUE.
THEY'RE YOUNG M'LOVE; THEY'LL HEAL.
WHAT'S THIS?
A WEAPON. SPARTA'S RULED BY A CODE DUELLO. NO ONE--SAVE THE EMPEROR OR HIS PERSONAL GUARD--IS ALLOWED ANY WEAPON WITH A REACH LONGER THAN A MAN'S ARM.
IN YOUR CASE, A SWORD. I HOPE YOU NEVER HAVE TO USE IT


IT'S LATE AFTERNOON BEFORE THE SEARCH PARTIES REGROUP, THEIR TRANSPORT MOVING QUICKLY BACK TO THE IMPERIAL CHALET-- BUILT AROUND AND INTO ONE OF THE MAJESTIC PEAKS THAT FORM THE CONTINENTAL SPINE OF MARATHON (SECOND OF SPARTA'S FOUR CONTINENTS.
IT'S THE EMPEROR'S "HOME AWAY FROM HOME."


THE TRANSPORT GROUNDS AT AN ISOLATED SHUTTLE BAY, THE COHORT DISPERSING TO BARRACKS...
... NO ONE NOTICING...
...ONE OF THEIR NUMBER MOVING DEEPER INTO THE CHALET...
THIS WHOLE WING IS GARTH'S PRIVATE TURF; HE COULD STASH AN ARMY HERE WITHOUT ANYONE NOTICING...
.. AND FROM THE LOOKS OF THINGS, THAT'S JUST WHAT HE'S DONE.
ONE ARMY, COMPLETE WITH CHAMBER OF HORRORS.
YOU ARE A BRUTE, TIKOS.
THREE DAYS YOU'VE HAD THE BOY, AND DISCOVERED NOTHING.

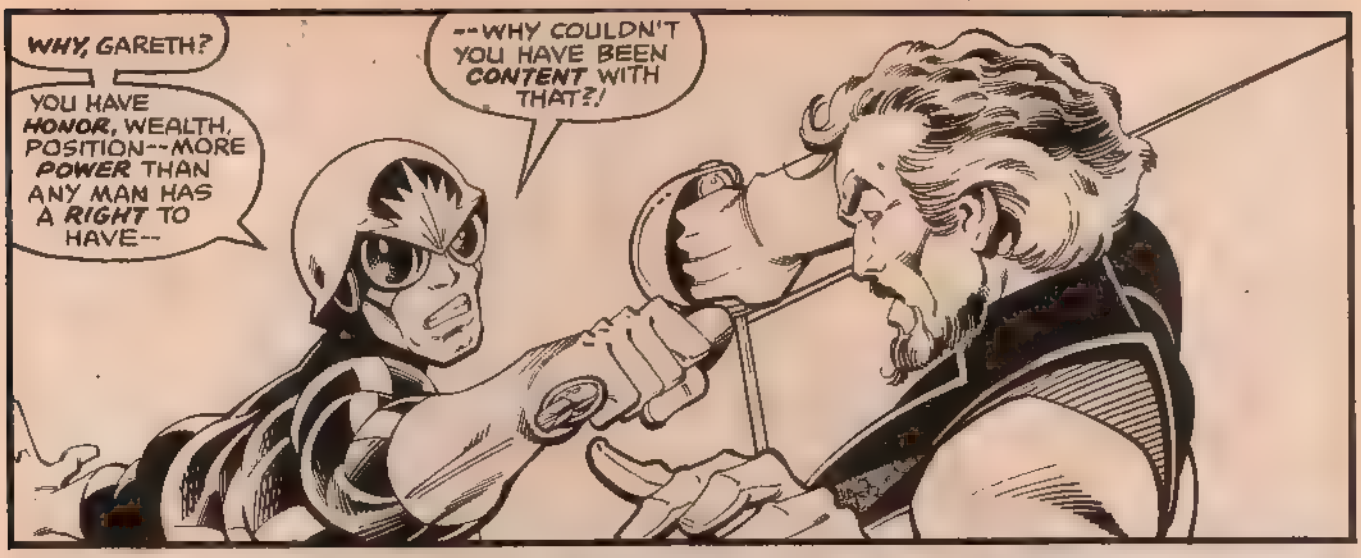
WHEN THE MIND-RIPPER ARRIVES FROM KANDAHAR, THAT'LL TEAR HIS SECRETS FROM HIM.
IN THE MEANTIME, THEIR RESISTANCE MUST BE BROKEN DOWN...
...WITH FINESSE.
I'LL START WITH THE GIRL.
YOU KILLED MY TWIN ON CINNIBAR, PRETTY-PRETTY. I'M GRATEFUL FOR THE CHANCE TO REPAY YOU KIND-FOR-KIND.

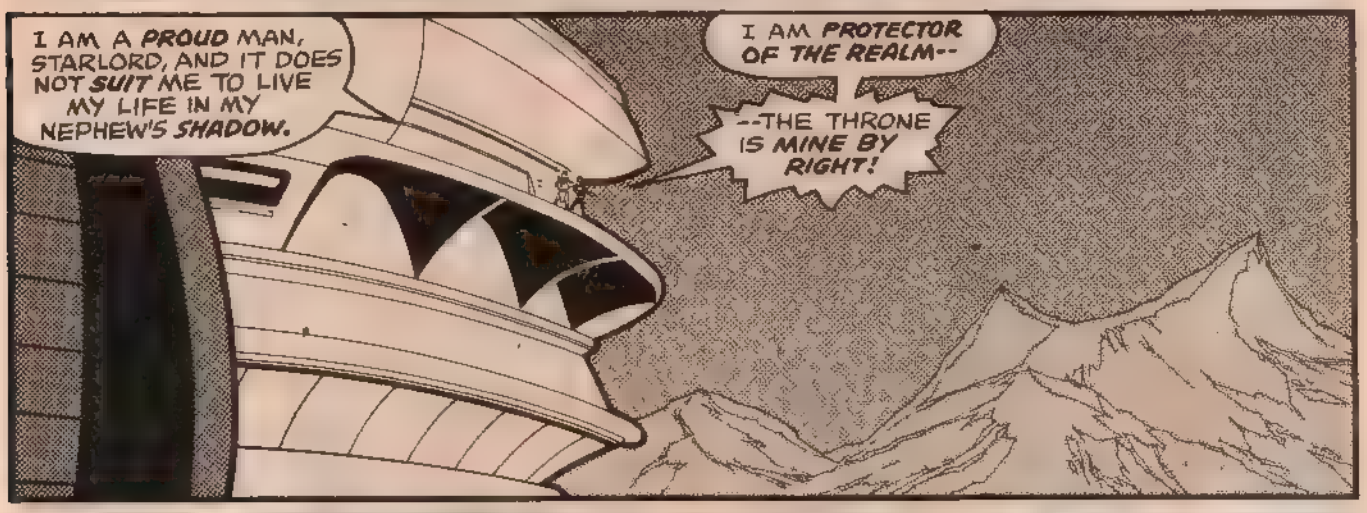
CORRECTION, YOUNGSTER. SHE'LL DIE NOT AT ALL.
AT LEAST, NOT BY YOUR HANDS.
STARLORD-- ALIVE?!?
APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEIVING.
MILORD ARION, I'LL--
WHOU-U-UFFF!!
THOD!
BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! THE PRINCE SAW YOUR CURSED SHIP GO DOWN IN FLAMES!
"MILORD ARION" ISN'T ANSWERING, JAILOR.
KRAK!
AAAGHHK!
HE'S GONE TO VISIT HIS BROTHER. PERMANENTLY!
HARD TO... STAND. FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN FIGHTING THE MOTHER OF ALL... HURRICANES...
WE'LL HELP YOU WALK, KIP. C'MON, WE'VE GOT TO GET TO THE EMPEROR BEFORE WE'RE STOPPED.
MY FATHER... MOTHER TAUGHT ME TO REVERE LIFE, Y'KNOW? BUT ARION... I KILLED HIM AS I WOULD A POISONOUS BUG.
I DIDN'T FEEL A THING.
YOU WILL, KIP. IN TIME
I'M AFRAID YOUR TIME S RUN OUT, STARLORD.
PATHAN'S HELL, WE'VE BEEN RUMBLED!

I AM GARETH, PRINCE OF THE REALM, GRAND ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET-- UNCLE OF THE EMPEROR.
MY COMPANION IS RRUOTHK'AR-- SITH-LORD OF THE ARIGUAN CONFEDERACY.
WE ARE YOUR EXECUTIONERS.
TAKE THIS TO THE EMPEROR, KIP-- I'LL GIVE YOU AND SANDY AN OPENING TO THE FAR END OF THE BALLUSTRADE-- AFTER THAT, IT'S UP TO YOU.
I'LL HANDLE THINGS HERE.
STAR-LORD...
GO.
WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, HE ATTACKS, SPARKS FLASHING AS HIS SWORD CRASHES AGAINST THE SITH-LORD'S...
...THE SHEER, ANIMAL FEROCITY OF HIS CHARGE TAKING BOTH THE ARIGUAN AND PRINCE GARETH BY SURPRISE.
SANDY, RUN-- STARLORD'S GIVEN US OUR CHANCE!
BUT HIS FACE, KIP--THE HATRED ON IT. AS IF HE'D MET LIZARD-BEAK SOME-WHERE BEFORE.
IN TRUTH, SANDY, HE HAS.

MEMORIES PULL AT HIM AS HE FIGHTS-- COUNTERING THE SITH-LORD'S RAW POWER WITH A SKILL HE HADN'T KNOWN HE'D POSSESSED.
THAT FACE-- EVEN THOUGH HE WAS WEARING A HELMET, THEN, IT'S HIM!
HE'D BEEN A BOY OF ELEVEN, AND IT HAD BEEN A HOT, SULTRY NIGHT, THAT 11th OF AUGUST WHEN HE'D LAST MET RRUOTHK'AR...
TAIL-- LIKE A THIRD ARM. TRYING TO SNAP MY NECK-- CHOKE ME!
... THE NIGHT THE SITH-LORD MURDERED MEREDITH QUILL.
IT WON'T WORK, MONSTER!
HE'D PLAYED THIS SCENE MANY TIMES IN HIS DREAMS-- QUILL THE AVENGING ANGEL! -- AND THOUGHT HE'D PURGED HIMSELF OF HIS HATE.
QY!ATh3 !!
HE HADN'T.
THE HATE IS A RISING CRIMSON TIDE WITHIN HIM, A LUST-- A NEED!-- THAT WILL NOT BE DENIED.
DIE!!
IN MY MOTHER'S NAME, MONSTER--
GOD FORGIVE HIM, IT FEELS GLORIOUS.
I AM IMPRESSED, STARLORD.
RRUOTHK'AR WAS CHAMPION OF HIS PEOPLE. I KNOW OF ONLY TWO MEN LIVING WHO COULD DEFEAT HIM IN SINGLE COMBAT.
I AM ONE OF THEM.
I KNOW.
I'LL GIVE YOU A CHOICE I DENIED THE LIZARD, GARETH. SURRENDER.

PRINCE GARETH TO YOU, MY FRIEND.
AND DON'T DICTATE TERMS UNTIL YOU'VE WON, STARLORD. I'VE COME TOO FAR TO BE STOPPED BY THE LIKES OF YOU.
SO HAVE I.
LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH.
EN GARDE!
IT BEGINS. FEINTS AT FIRST AS THE TWO FEEL EACH OTHER OUT-- THEN ATTACK, RIPOSTE, PARRY, DISENGAGE..
...THE SWORDS SOON MOVING FASTER THAN THE EYE CAN FOLLOW.
THERE'S AN UNREAL QUALITY TO THE COMBAT, THAT THE FATE OF A GALAXY-SPANNING EMPIRE...
..SHOULD BE DECIDED BY TWO MEN DUELING WITH SWORDS...
...ON A LEDGE A MILE ABOVE THE GROUND.


WHY, GARETH?
YOU HAVE HONOR, WEALTH, POSITION--MORE POWER THAN ANY MAN HAS A RIGHT TO HAVE--
--WHY COULDN'T YOU HAVE BEEN CONTENT WITH THAT?!


I AM A PROUD MAN, STARLORD, AND IT DOES NOT SUIT ME TO LIVE MY LIFE IN MY NEPHEW'S SHADOW.
I AM PROTECTOR OF THE REALM--
--THE THRONE IS MINE BY RIGHT!

KARTHON'S BONES, THERE'S A DUEL ON SKY LEVEL 4!
DUEL, HELL! SCRAMBLE, YOU STEELBACKS! GET DOWN THERE ON THE JUMP! THAT COSTUMED BRAVO'S GUTTED THE ARIGUAN SITH-LORD--
--AND NOW HE'S TRYING FOR PRINCE GARETH!

AND THE WORLDS DESTROYED, THE PEOPLE SLAIN AND SLAVED TO FINANCE YOUR TAKEOVER--?!
WHAT OF THEM?
THEY WERE LIVING BEINGS, GARETH; THEIR LIVES WERE PRECIOUS!
TO THEM, IF NO ONE ELSE!

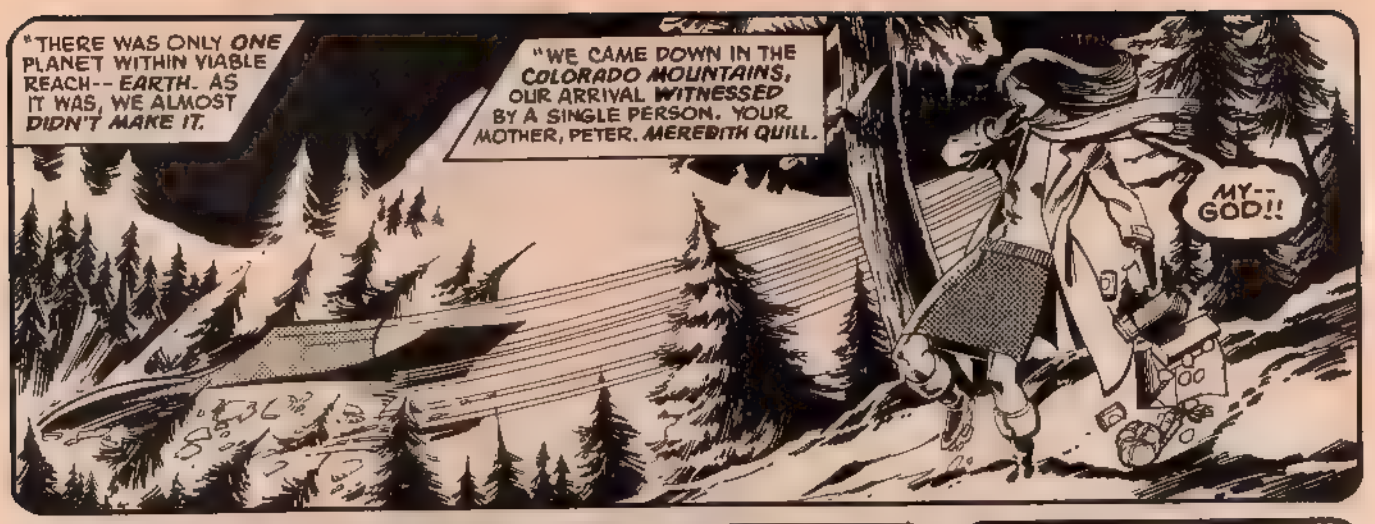
DAMN!
YOU TALK TOO MUCH, STARLORD!
WHEN YOU DUEL A MASTER, YOU HAVE TO KEEP YOUR MIND AND CONCENTRATION ON THE JOB AT HAND!
DON'T MOVE, MY FRIEND, I KNOW OF YOUR FLYING POWERS.
THIS SWORD HAS A BLASTER BUILT INTO IT-- TRY ANY-THING...
... AND I'LL BURN YOU WHERE YOU STAND.
I'M GOING TO KILL YOU, STARLORD.
BUT BEFORE I DO, I WANT TO SEE YOUR FACE.
N-NO! IT CAN'T BE--!
WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO HIM?!
STOP BABBLING, DODO--REACT! BEFORE GARETH CAN RECOVER HIMSELF!
KIK!
MY SWORD..!
I BELIEVE WE WERE TALKING ABOUT KILLING...
IS MINE NOW, PRINCE.

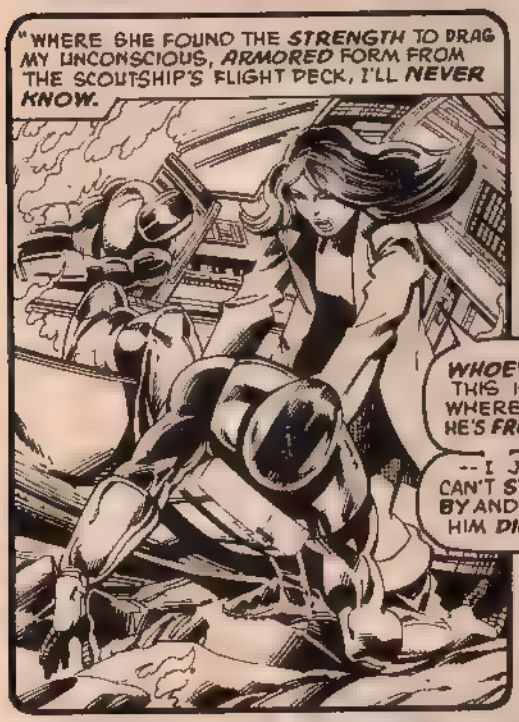
YOU'RE BLUFFING.
TRY ME.
MURDER ISN'T IN YOU, STARLORD. ONCE-UPON-A-TIME, PERHAPS, BUT NO MORE.
DAMN HIS SOUL, THE MAN'S ...RIGHT.
LIKE "SHIP" SAYS, I'M STARLORD.
I HAVE TO STAND FOR SOMETHING.
ALIVE OR DEAD, GARETH, YOU'RE FINISHED.
PERHAPS.
PERHAPS NOT.
THE BLADE IS POISONED, STARLORD. AND ONCE I'VE PITCHED YOUR CORPSE OFF THE BALCONY, IT'LL BE THE CHILDREN'S WORDS AGAINST MINE.
THEY SIMPLY WON'T BE BELIEVED.
YOU'VE FAILED, MY FRIEND.
NO!
INSTINCT, TWISTING HIM INTO A COMBAT CROUCH, TRIGGERING REACTIONS INGRAINED IN PETER QUILL ON EARTH AN ETERNITY AGO...
...OH...
...WHEN HE'D BEEN TAUGHT TO KILL.

IT SEEMS.. I'VE...
...UNDERESTIMATED YOU MY FRIEND, I'LL.. NOT MAKE THAT MISTAKE... AGAIN ..
BUT YOU'VE WON A... PYRRHIC VICTORY, STAR... LORD, FOR AS I... DIE...
...MY POISON... KILLS... YOU... TOO..
SILENCE.
OH BOY.
QUILL, YOU SURE KNOW HOW TO PICK 'EM.
TAKE IT EASY, PAL. RELAX AND BREATHE. LET YOUR BODY HANDLE THE POISON.
MUST'A BEEN A HELLUVA DOSE... FEEL WEAK AS... BABY...
ON YOUR FEET, ASSASSIN!
YOU'VE MURDERED A PRINCE OF THE REALM. FAIR DUEL OR NO, YOU'RE FOR THE HIGH JUMP.
I SERVED WITH THE PRINCE, MAJOR --AND THE SCUM WHO KILLED HIM DOESN'T DESERVE A TRIAL.
I SAY, KILL HIM NOW!
I WOULDN'T DO THAT, GENTLEMEN, IF I WERE YOU.

MY ON-BOARD SYSTEMS ARE FULLY CHARGED AND OPERATIONAL, STARLORD. LONG-RANGE SCANS MARK MULTIPLE CONTACTS VECTORING THIS POSITION AT THEIR MAXIMUM SUB-LIGHT VELOCITY.
JUST SAY THE WORD.
I CAN LEVEL THIS MOUNTAIN AND HAVE US ON OUR WAY LONG BEFORE ANY OF THEM PULL WITHIN RANGE, THOUGH.
NO, "SHIP"...
...THERE'S BEEN ENOUGH BLOOD SHED TODAY.
UNDERSTOOD.
WHAT GOES ON HERE?!?
STARLORD, LOOK! WE FOUND THE EMPEROR!
MY LIEGE!
SO I SEE.
BUT... WHO ARE YOU?!?
PETER JASON QUILL...
...I AM YOUR FATHER.

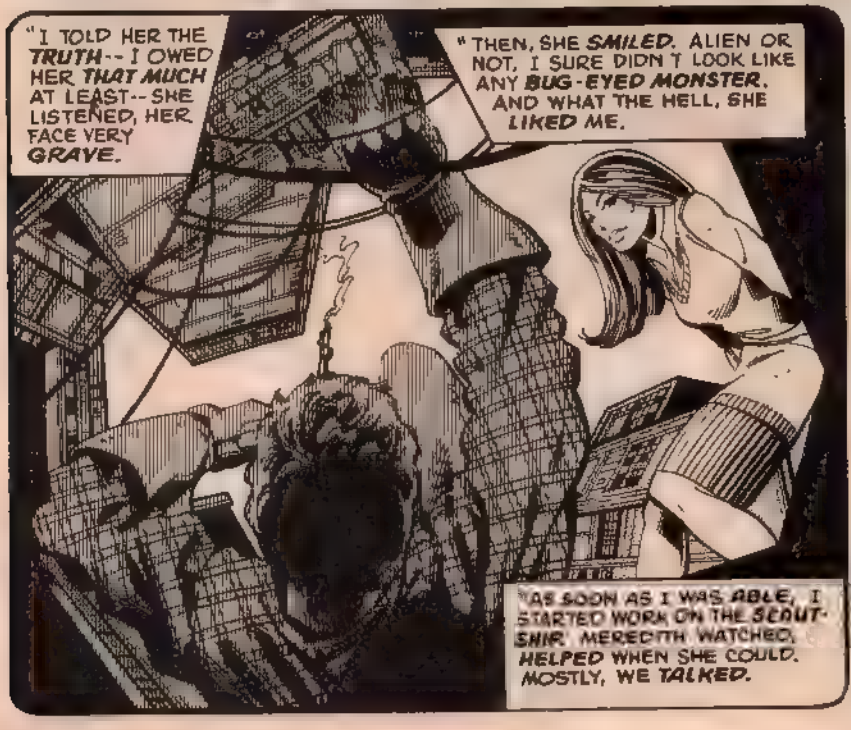
4: the Hollow Crown
IT'S BEEN A BUSY DAY. ONCE THE INFORMATION IN STARLORD'S DATA PACK WAS CONFIRMED, THE IMPERIAL GUARD MOVED AGAINST GARETH'S MERCENARIES, WHILE THE FLEET TOOK UP POSITIONS ALONG THE TWICE LINE -- IN CASE THE ARIGUANS WERE TEMPTED TO TRY SOME MISCHIEF...
WITHIN A FEW HOURS AFTER GARETH'S DEATH, THE CONSPIRACY WAS SMASHED.
I AM FOREVER IN YOUR DEBT, MY SON.
THAT HOLO-PAINTING, STARLORD -- IT'S YOU!
NO, KIP -- IT'S ME. PAINTED TO COMMEMORATE MY VICTORY OVER THE ARIGUAN CONFEDERACY.
SOMETHING BOTHERING YOU, SANDY?
Huh? Oh... ah... NO, MAJESTY, IT... oh, HELLSTEETH, YES!
I FEEL LIKE A MARK IN THIS OUTFIT. GI' ME A TUNIC AN' PANTS AN' SOME POCKETS TO PICK. THEN I'LL BE HAPPY.
"I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL," THE EMPEROR REPLIES, HIS VOICE SOFT AS HIS MIND DRIFTS BACK ACROSS THE YEARS...
"I HATED COURT LIFE SO MUCH I FLED TO DEEP SPACE. MY HEART'S DESIRE WAS TO EXPLORE, AND FOR YEARS, I DID JUST THAT.
"THEN, WAR BROKE OUT BETWEEN THE EMPIRE AND THE ARIGUANS. MY FATHER SUMMONED ME HOME.
"EN ROUTE, THOUGH, MY SCOUTSHIP BLEW A CONVERTER, WE HAD TO MAKE PLANET-FALL AT ONCE, BEFORE THE ENTIRE WARP DRIVE MELTED ITSELF DOWN TO SLAG.


"THERE WAS ONLY ONE PLANET WITHIN VIABLE REACH-- EARTH. AS IT WAS, WE ALMOST DIDN'T MAKE IT.
"WE CAME DOWN IN THE COLORADO MOUNTAINS, OUR ARRIVAL WITNESSED BY A SINGLE PERSON. YOUR MOTHER, PETER. MEREDITH QUILL.
MY-- GOD!!


"WHERE SHE FOUND THE STRENGTH TO DRAG MY UNCONSCIOUS, ARMORED FORM FROM THE SCOUTSHIP'S FLIGHT DECK, I'LL NEVER KNOW.
WHOEVER THIS IS-- WHEREVER HE'S FROM--
-- I JUST CAN'T STAND BY AND LET HIM DIE!

C'MON, MISTER --BREATHE!
DEAR LORD, PLEASE MAKE HIM BREATHE!

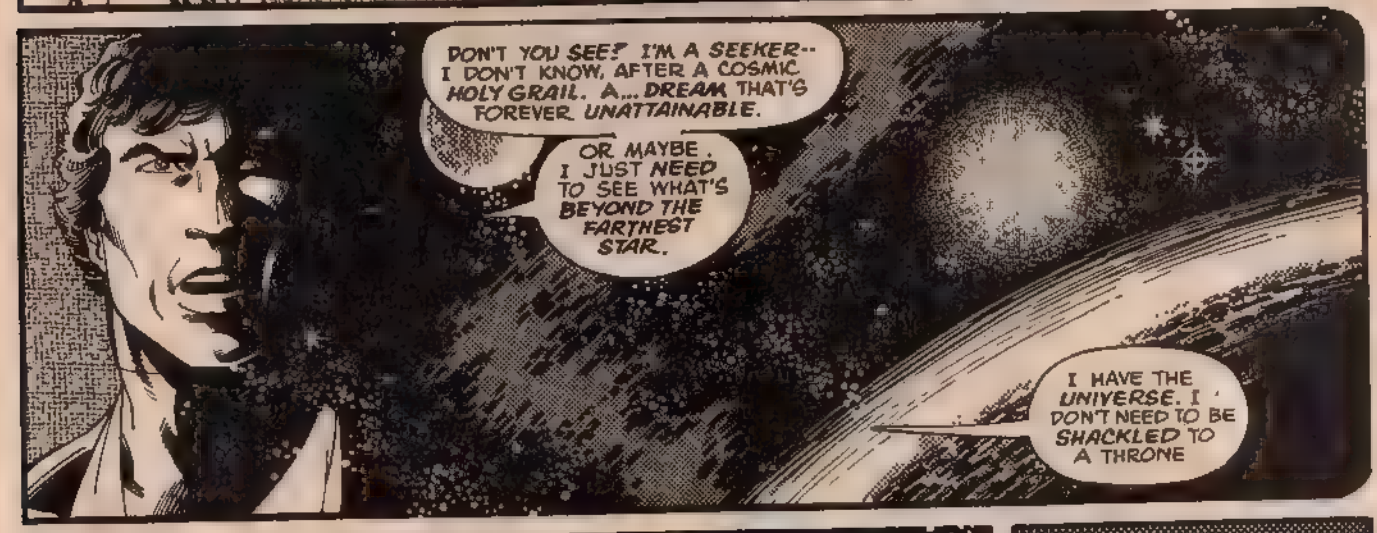
"SHE NEVER CALLED THE AUTHORITIES, BUT NURSED ME BACK TO HEALTH HERSELF. EVEN THOUGH, ALMOST FROM THE FIRST, SHE KNEW...
YOUR FRIEND DIED IN THE CRASH, JASON. I... BURIED HIM. I'M SORRY.
HE WAS A...CAT. SHAPED LIKE A MAN, BUT ...A CAT.
YOU'RE NOT HUMAN, ARE YOU? NOT OF EARTH?


"I TOLD HER THE TRUTH-- I OWED HER THAT MUCH AT LEAST-- SHE LISTENED, HER FACE VERY GRAVE.
"THEN, SHE SMILED. ALIEN OR NOT, I SURE DIDN'T LOOK LIKE ANY BUG-EYED MONSTER. AND WHAT THE HELL, SHE LIKED ME.
"AS SOON AS I WAS ABLE, I STARTED WORK ON THE SCOUTSHIP. MEREDITH WATCHED, HELPED WHEN SHE COULD. MOSTLY, WE TALKED.

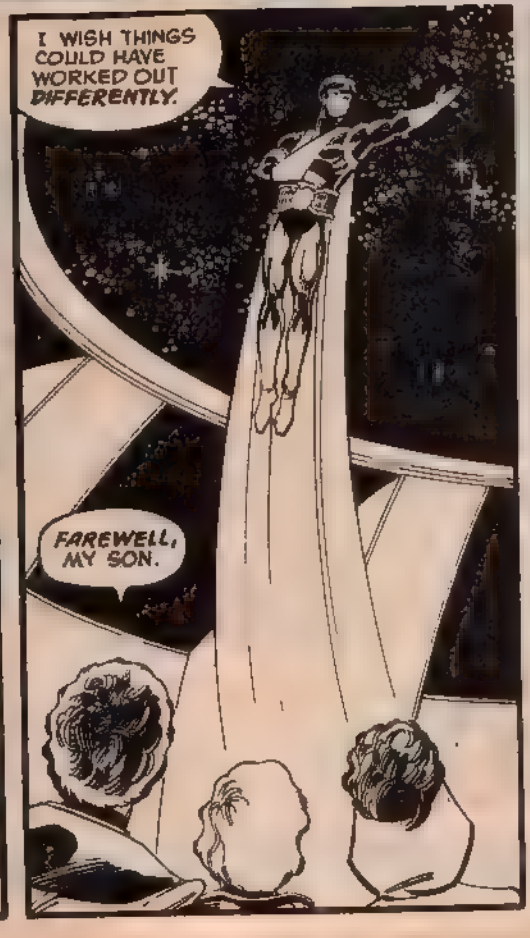
"STRANGE. AS IMPERIAL HEIR, I HAD MY PICK OF THE BEAUTIES OF TEN THOUSAND WORLDS.
"YET I FELL IN LOVE WITH MEREDITH AND SHE WITH ME.

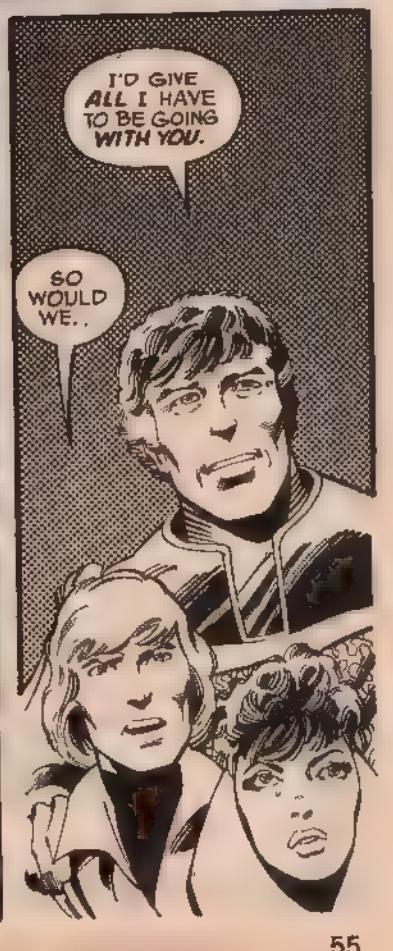
"A YEAR AFTER I'D ARRIVED, I WAS READY TO LEAVE.
TAKE ME WITH YOU.
I CAN'T. THE DRIVE'S JURY-RIGGED; THERE'S NO GUARANTEE I'LL GET HOME.
MORE IMPORTANTLY, I'LL HAVE TO CUT THROUGH ARIGUAN SPACE. THEY ARE NOT... KIND TO THEIR PRISONERS.
"THERE WAS A FINAL REASON MY BIO-COMPS TOLD ME MEREDITH WAS CARRYING MY CHILD. A SON. I WOULD NOT PUT THAT LIFE AT HAZARD FOR ANYTHING IN THE UNIVERSE.
"I TOLD MEREDITH I'D RETURN FOR HER AS SOON AS I COULD.
"AND THEN, FOR SAFETY'S SAKE, I PUT A MINDLOCK ON HER MEMORIES OF ME, OF THE YEAR WE'D SPENT TOGETHER. BETTER SHE SHOULD THINK THIS A DREAM...
"I DIDN'T KNOW THAT WITHIN A MONTH AFTER MY DEPARTURE MEREDITH WOULD FIND HERSELF BETROTHED AND MARRIED TO HER CHILDHOOD SWEETHEART.
"I SHOULD HAVE TAKEN HER, WHATEVER THE RISK. AS IT WAS, I MADE IT HOME WITHOUT INCIDENT.
"BUT THE WAR WAS GOING BADLY, AND IT WAS YEARS BEFORE THE BALANCE TIPPED IN OUR FAVOR-- EVEN THEN, I COULDN'T GET AWAY; I WAS... NEEDED. SO I TURNED TO MY UNCLE, GARETH...
...BRING YOUR WIFE AND HEIR TO SPARTA, NEPHEW? IT'LL BE MY PLEASURE.
YOU ROMANTIC DEVIL. I DIDN'T THINK YOU HAD IT IN YOU.
"I KNOW NOW THAT GARETH NEVER WENT TO EARTH, BUT TO SHAKATI'S PALACE ON CINNIBAR...
...KILL THE WOMAN AND HER WHELP? INTERESTING. I SUPPOSE -- AFTER A SUITABLE INTERVAL -- YOUR NEPHEW WOULD MEET WITH AN UNTIMELY... ACCIDENT?
PRECISELY.
"TROUBLE WAS, RRUOTHK'AR BOTCHED IT. HE SLEW MY BELOVED MEREDITH...
FZAK
ITU
"...BUT MISSED MY SON."

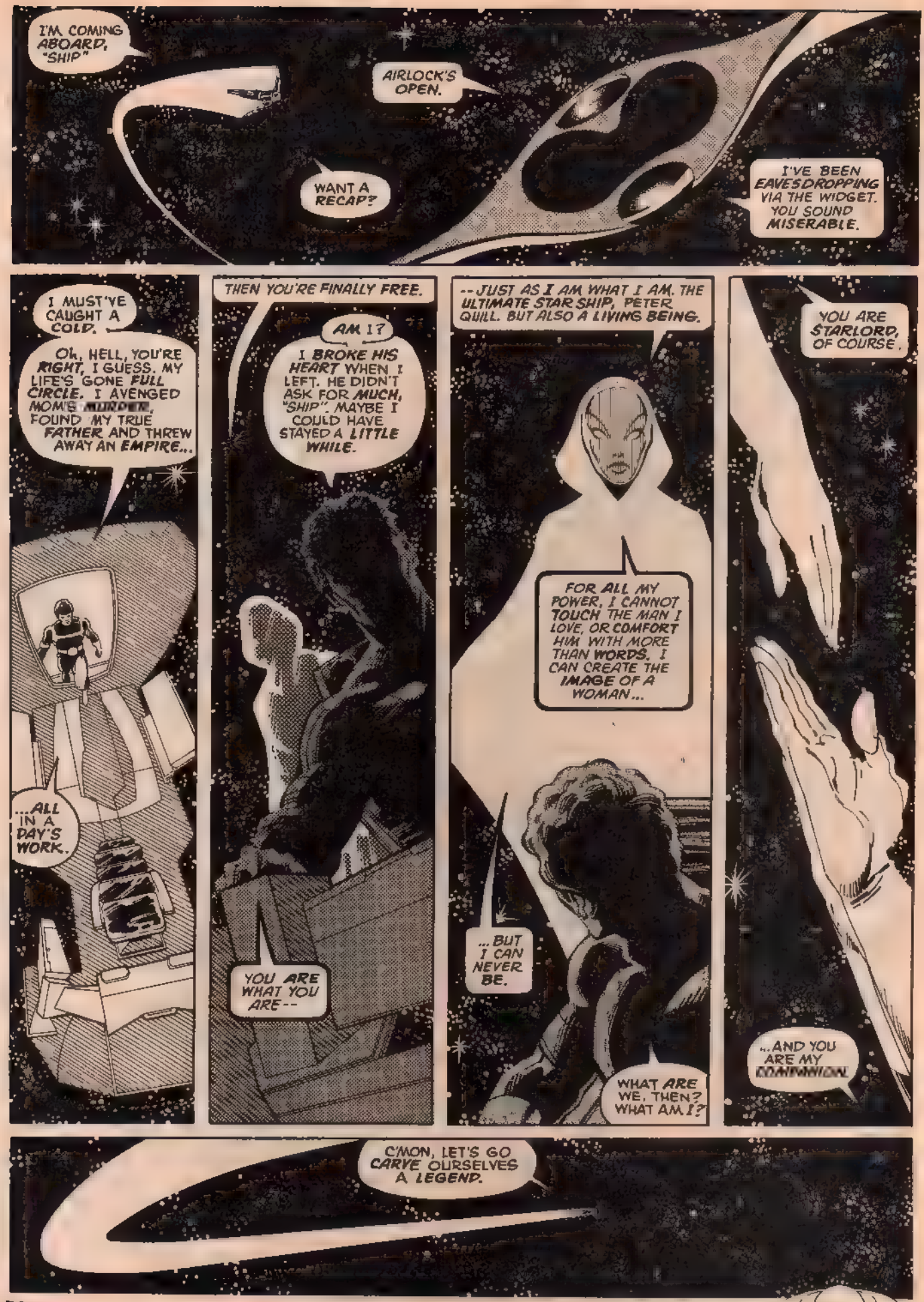
GARETH TOLD ME MEREDITH HAD DIED IN CHILDBIRTH, AND HER SON WITH HER. A PART OF ME DIED THEN, TOO. I NEVER LOVED AGAIN, PETER, NEVER MARRIED.
BUT NOW-- MIRACLE OF MIRACLES-- MY SON HAS BEEN RETURNED TO ME.
HAVE I?
WHAT ARE YOU OFFERING ME-- AN EMPIRE? A THRONE?
I LEFT ALL THAT BEHIND ON EARTH.

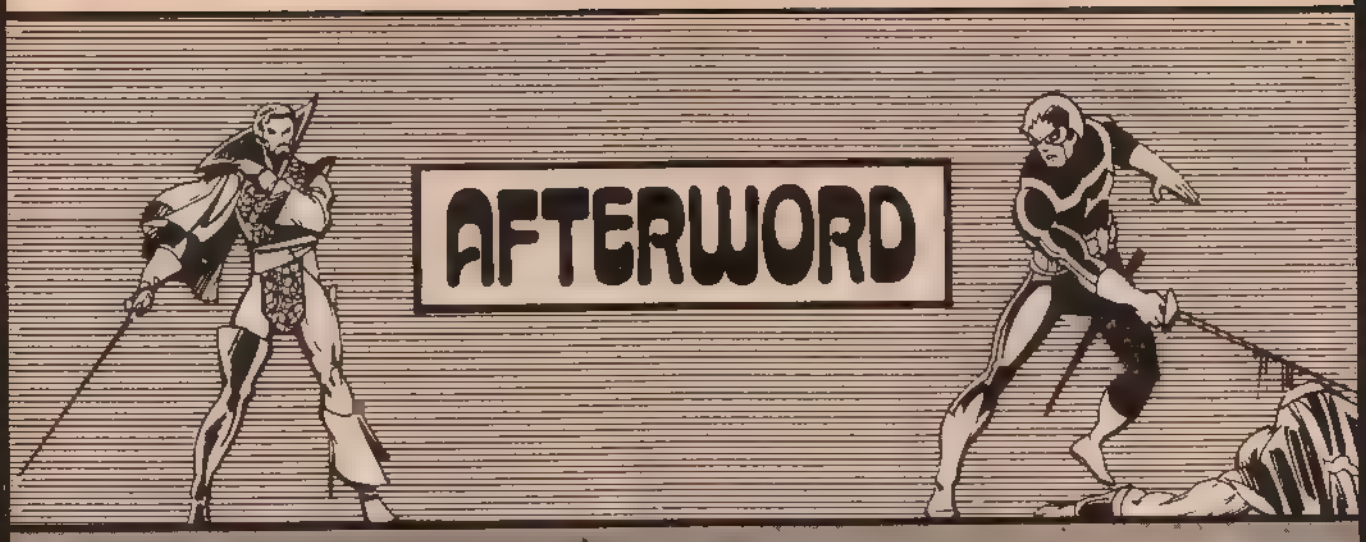

DON'T YOU SEE? I'M A SEEKER-- I DON'T KNOW, AFTER A COSMIC HOLY GRAIL. A... DREAM THAT'S FOREVER UNATTAINABLE.
OR MAYBE. I JUST NEED TO SEE WHAT'S BEYOND THE FARTHEST STAR.
I HAVE THE UNIVERSE. I DON'T NEED TO BE SHACKLED TO A THRONE

I AM STARLORD.
IF YOU WANT A SON, AN HEIR, ADOPT KIP. HE'LL MAKE YOU THE KIND OF SON I COULD NEVER BE.
SO LONG AS SANDY'S AROUND TO KEEP HIS HEAD ON STRAIGHT.
Huh--?!?


I WISH THINGS COULD HAVE WORKED OUT DIFFERENTLY.
FAREWELL, MY SON.


I'D GIVE ALL I HAVE TO BE GOING WITH YOU.
SO WOULD WE..


I'M COMING ABOARD, "SHIP"
AIRLOCK'S OPEN.
WANT A RECAP?
I'VE BEEN EAVESDROPPING VIA THE WIDGET. YOU SOUND MISERABLE.
I MUST'VE CAUGHT A COLD.
OH, HELL, YOU'RE RIGHT, I GUESS. MY LIFE'S GONE FULL CIRCLE. I AVENGED MOM'S MURDER, FOUND MY TRUE FATHER AND THREW AWAY AN EMPIRE...
...ALL IN A DAY'S WORK.
THEN YOU'RE FINALLY FREE.
AM I?
I BROKE HIS HEART WHEN I LEFT. HE DIDN'T ASK FOR MUCH, "SHIP". MAYBE I COULD HAVE STAYED A LITTLE WHILE.
YOU ARE WHAT YOU ARE--
--JUST AS I AM WHAT I AM. THE ULTIMATE STAR SHIP, PETER QUILL. BUT ALSO A LIVING BEING.
FOR ALL MY POWER, I CANNOT TOUCH THE MAN I LOVE, OR COMFORT HIM WITH MORE THAN WORDS. I CAN CREATE THE IMAGE OF A WOMAN...
...BUT I CAN NEVER BE.
WHAT ARE WE, THEN? WHAT AM I?
YOU ARE STARLORD, OF COURSE.
...AND YOU ARE MY COMPANION.
C'MON, LET'S GO CARVE OURSELVES A LEGEND.



Well, if you've made it this far, dear reader, you've very nearly reached the end: from here on, there are just some ad pages, the lettercol and presto! it's all over. One magazine, one story, "X" minutes of your life. But before you go, I figured I'd get a few more words in, just for the hell of it. I'm not sure why. Part of the reason, I think, has to do with the size of this thing. It's been a fortnight or so since I finished the physical writing of the story and I'm far from having worked it out of my system.

Ever since I started working in comics — not all that many years ago, now that I think of it — I've wanted to cut loose and do an honest to God SF story in a comic book. The real thing, as opposed to the Hulk getting kidnapped by Toad-Men or Thor sailing the galaxies in the starjammer longship or even the Kree Skrull-Avengers War — though each of these stories is, in its way, science-fiction. I started my professional writing career in SF, sold my first legit story to an SF mag before I ever sold a plot to Marvel, and in the years since, something has always pushed me towards merging the two genres — even though it's an axiom of the comic book industry that SF-oriented books don't sell — wherever I got the chance. Which is why - though only John Byrne and I knew it — *K'un-Lun* was founded by survivors of an alien starship that had crashed on earth almost a million years ago, making Danny Rand/Iron Fist's heritage both Terran *and* alien. It's why Dave Cockrum and I have been setting up the imminent end of the universe over the last dozen-odd issues of X-MEN. I *like* SF and I think comics and science fiction are made for each other.

Which brings us to *Starlord*.

In my heart of hearts, I wanted to write something I could stand alongside James Blish's *A Case of Conscience*, or the best of John Brunner or Larry Niven or Harlan Ellison. And maybe, someday, I will, if *Starlord* proves successful.

Because that's what this book is all about, success. We need it, badly, in the first place, so we can come back next year with — for want of a better title — *Starlord, Book 2*. Or, perhaps, come back with something completely different. And better.

In closing, I want to thank someone I've respected all my life, someone I've always wanted to meet (someone who, when I finally *did* meet him at a Nebula Awards dinner two years ago, was treated to the delightful spectacle of a youthful, blond, bearded — presumably articulate — writer, stumbling over a frozen mind and condensing paeans of worshipful praise into a concise, "Ah, gee, ah, your work... man, it's far out, y'know. I mean, it's really great." God above, talk about your wanting to drop dead on the spot!) I'm writing now, not speaking, and as far as I know, the object of this "thank you" is on the other side of the continent. So, with luck, this time I'll say what I want to say without making a fool of myself. (On the other hand, one never knows.)

The man I've been babbling about is *Robert A. Heinlein*.

I grew up reading his so-called juveniles; hell, I read every book of his I could get my hands on as soon as I could find them. What I couldn't find at the local library, I ended up buying. Or scrounging. He was the man who got me dreaming, who got me — eventually — to write science fiction, and that's the kind of gift that can never be repaid. At best, it can be acknowledged. I read other authors over the years — lots of them — and found stories and styles I came to like better than his, but Heinlein was the first. And in many ways, the best.

I've met him once, and if I ever meet him again, I'll probably be just as tongue-tied. Hopefully, he'll still be as gently tolerant. All I know of him, I've gleaned from his books and stories. But they're my very old friends and, in a very real sense, so is he.

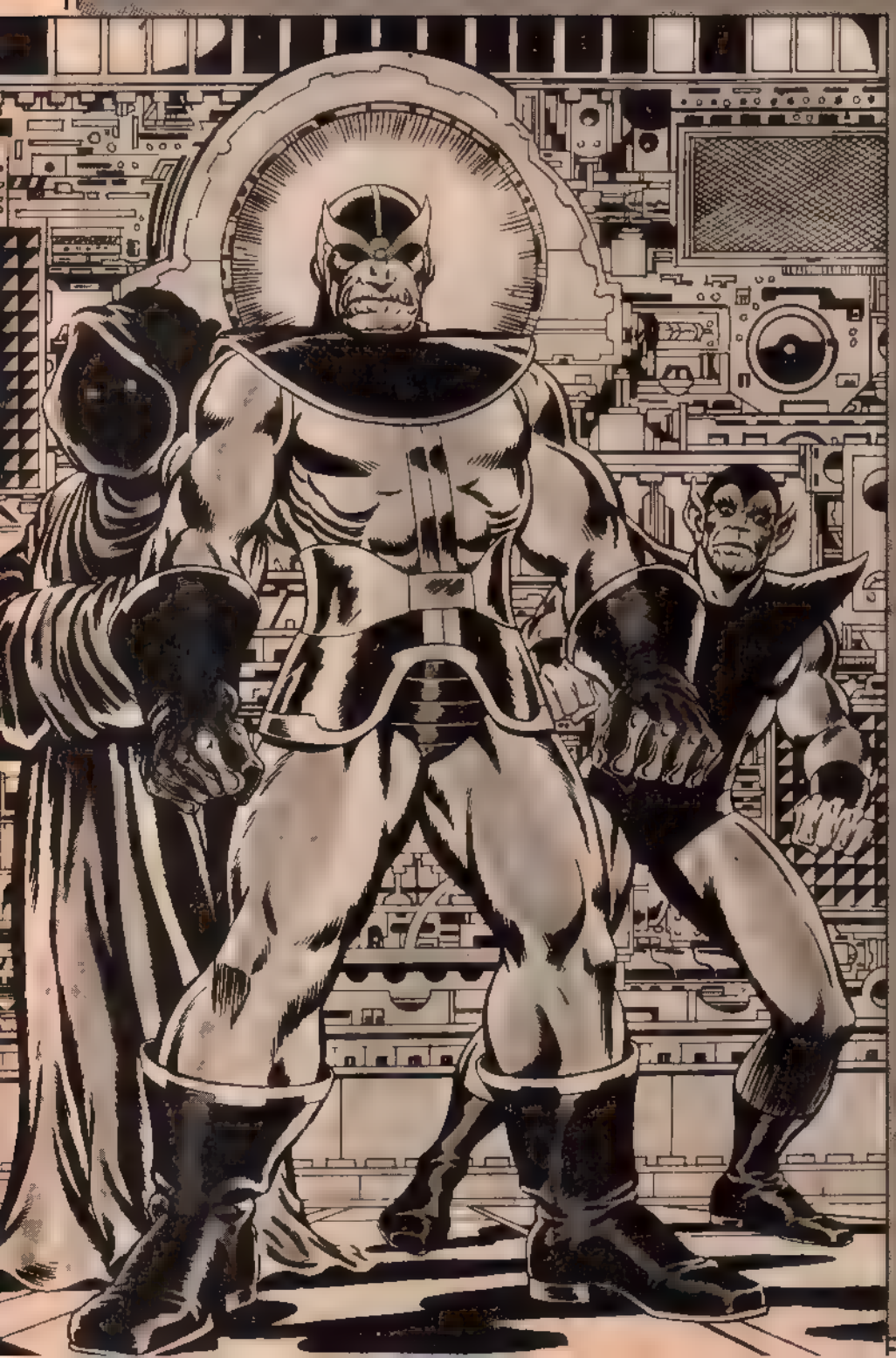
And what are friends for, if we can't dedicate our work to them?

This book is for you, Mr. Heinlein, with more thanks than I can ever express.

CHRIS CLAREMONT

Our Alien Heritage or The Central-Casting Syndrome

By
JOHN L. BYRNE



"... Were we to meet with a Creature of a much different Shape from Man, with Reason and Speech, we should be much surprised and shocked at the Sight. For if we try to imagine or paint a Creature like a Man in every Thing else, but that has a Neck four times as long, and great round Eyes five or six times as big, and farther distant, we cannot look upon't without the utmost Aversion, altho' at the same time we can give no account of our Dislike ... For 'tis a very ridiculous Opinion, that the common People have got, that 'tis impossible a rational Soul should dwell in any other Shape than ours ... This can proceed from nothing but the Weakness, Ignorance, and Prejudice of Men."

CHRISTIANUS HUYGENS: "New Conjectures Concerning the Planetary Worlds, Their Inhabitants and Productions" (circa 1670)

"Facing him from the middle of the room was something that was neither human nor humanoid. It stood on three legs, and it regarded Louis Wu from two directions, from two flat heads mounted on flexible, slender necks. Over most of its startling frame the skin was white and glove-soft; but a thick, coarse brown mane ran down from between the beast's necks, back along its spine, to cover the complex-looking hip joint of the hind leg. The two forelegs were set wide apart, so that the beast's small, clawed hooves formed almost an equilateral triangle."

LARRY NIVEN, describing Nessus, the Mad Puppeteer; "Ringworld" (copyright 1970)

Something like three centuries lie between the two statements quoted above, yet their philosophies are essentially the same. When Man begins questing into the worlds beyond his own, be they our immediate neighbors within the Solar System or planets circling distant stars, it is unlikely he will ever again en-

counterbeings quite like those he leaves behind on Earth.

Imagining aliens, inventing physiognomies for beings dwelling beyond our immediate knowledge, is a hobby only slightly younger than Man. The earliest instances probably date back to our remotest ancestor's first awareness that another tribe of creatures like himself lived just over the next hill.

In those earliest days, Man was already aware of the vast diversity of life sharing this planet with him. His immediate environs might have been restricted to a few hundred square miles surrounding the Olduvai Gorge, in southern Africa, but the wealth of lifeforms could not have escaped his notice. And as Man spread out, slowly, from his beginnings, the environment modified him, so that Man himself can to be diverse, ranging from dark-haired, dark-eyed, dark-skinned, all through the myriad combinations to the light-haired, light-eyed, light-skinned natives of the northern regions.

We cannot guess what chances of circumstance separated Man into the geographical pockets he eventually came to inhabit, but we know it happened, or there would have been little or no culture-shock when Europeans began exploring their world, and discovered other races. Slavery was a direct result, and easily justified by the refusal to acknowledge black-skinned people as true humans.

Given that as a starting point, Man began wondering just how many different ways Nature might have twisted the basic form, producing other creatures that were not quite Men. (The Oriental races escaped slavery largely because of their more advanced cultures, often even more advanced than the Europeans. Unable to dismiss them as less than human, the European explorers grudgingly accepted the Chinese and Japanese as "honorary whites," a condition which has existed, in one form or another, down to the present.)

The point is, when Man imagined his neighbors in foreign lands, he invariably used himself as a basis. Texts of four or five hundred years ago abound with drawings of bird headed men: men with a single giant foot: or with their faces in their stomachs. This probably dates back to our primitive ancestors, dressing in hides and bones, seeking to emulate the power of beasts they judged stronger than themselves. Eventually such play acting, combined with Man's natural curiosity, his consuming need to know all he can about his world, lead to the creation of primitive religions, and the structuring of the Gods.

Gods and demons were the first "aliens" Man created, using them to explain what he then judged to be unexplainable. Creation myths abound throughout primitive cultures extant today, and a common theme can be found in most of them, the Creators tend to be all-powerful beings in roughly human form, but possessed of the attributes of those creatures the tribes consider most powerful. The formalization of a man-in-a-bearskin into a Bear-God is a simple and straightforward one, given that Man tends to be literal-minded, even with stories he creates himself.

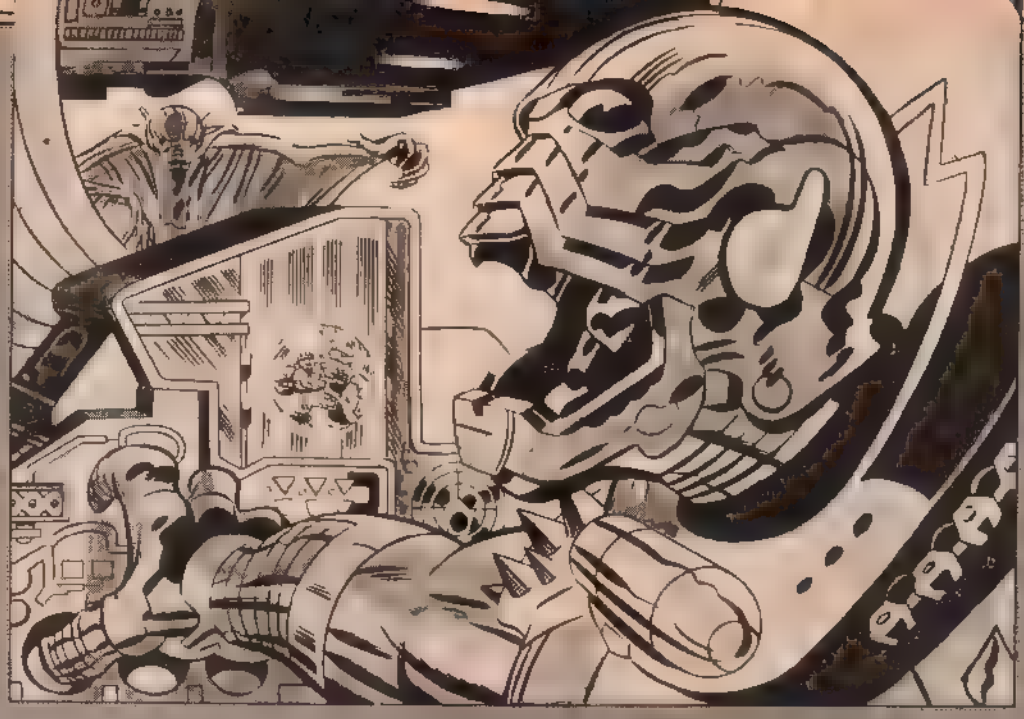
The imbuing of otherwise humanoid deities with animal characteristics has persisted down through the centuries, so that even the otherwise quite pedestrian gods of the Ancient Greeks count the half-goat Pan in their number. Odysseus encountered many bizarre folk in his journey, most noteworthy of which being the notorious Cyclops.

The Hindus *still* worship beings with animal characteristics, and even the relatively new Christian faith is not without such influences, given the common representation of Angels. (The Devil, horned and hooved as he is, could be considered in this light, but most contemporary theologians consider the visualization of Satan to have been "borrowed" from Pan, who, for some reason, was a god greatly feared by early Christians, and even gave us the word "panic.")

Again, though, however bizarre the accoutrements, the basic form is that of Man, bipedal, monocephalic, possessed of two manipulatory appendages. Please note that I did not say *arms*. For some reason it has always pleased the human imagination to play most with the very things which make us so unique, the hands and arms. Science fiction stories abound with otherwise human creatures who somehow manage to possess tentacles, or lampreys, or no upper limbs at all. The fact that the absence of an opposable thumb would make it almost impossible for a human-like creature to evolve anything like a recognizable culture or technology is generally ignored. I say "human-like" because Nature may well have concocted thousands upon thousands of completely non-human creatures who, by virtue of something functioning instead of hands (as with the manipulatory mouths of Niven's Puppeteers), may well have contrived societies more advanced than our own. And a race does not, of itself, need to be a tool-maker if it has the power to enslave those who are.

In other words, there is no more reason to assume that beings from other worlds will be even remotely like Man than there is to believe that Man among all living things shares the shape of the Gods.

Hollywood has done little to dispell the myth of humanoid aliens, and it is this perpetuation of a misconception that I refer to as the "Central Casting Syndrome," to wit: "Hey, Manny, we



need forty-seven aliens for THE RETURN OF THE CREATURE THAT DEVOURED PITTSBURGH. Call Central-Casting." Man has portrayed aliens for as long as he has existed, and so the form of aliens has always been that of man. So much so that even in the comics, where imagination need not be restricted by the need for humans to portray the aliens, the form has held much the same. Most writers and artists seem unable, or unwilling to concoct creatures truly representative of other, alien environments.

Albert Einstein once remarked that "God does not play at dice." He meant that there is no function of the universe that is not the direct result of measurable, recordable phenomenon. And in the vast, cosmic scope on which he dealt, Einstein was essentially correct. It is on the more finite levels, the biological levels, that the element of chance becomes not only more apparent, but even more necessary.

Life on Earth is the result of some four billion years of evolutionary accidents. Misaligned genes over four thousand million years have served to produce the seemingly endless variety of life on Earth. And to assume that such a pattern of hit and miss evolution could have occurred on a planet circling another star is preposterous. Man looks as he does because he began precisely where and when he did, on a planet of a specific gravity, with specific seasons, at a precise distance from its sun. Had any one of those points varied, there would not be Men on Earth. There might well be intelligent beings who called themselves something that would translate as human (as all races and tongues call themselves something which translates roughly as "the people") but we would not recognize them as such.

Marvel Comics (and indeed this writer) must assume as large a slice of the blame for the perpetuation of this myth as anyone else. We have the Kree, the Skrulls, the Badoon, the Watcher, the Stranger, the Space Phantom, Galactus. A dozen dozen alien races, all of whom look essentially like us, and all of whom, in doing so, violate a score of Natural Laws. Remember the giants that Thor encountered a few years ago? The beings so big the hairs on their arms were like tree-trunks? And yet they were human proportioned. As any competent anatomist will tell you a Man-like form can only grow so big, without its own weight shattering its legs. Remember the Skrulls, classic pulp fiction aliens, with hideous men and beautiful females? But for her green skin a Skrull female could pose for a Playboy Centerfold without raising an eyebrow.

The Badoon seem, superficially, to fare a little better. Their females are totally different from the males, being hairy instead of scaly, but both are none the-less humanoid.

Out of Hollywood, the Ymir came TWENTY MILLION MILES TO EARTH to look like anyone else, who hasn't had his morning coffee, and while Klaatu possessed the power to engineer THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL he still looked enough like Michael Rennie to give Pat Neal the whim-whams.

And to top it all, we get Mr. Spock. Now, my admiration for Gene Roddenberry is enormous. He gave us a quality SF show when everyone else was giving us dreck. But Spock, a key part of the show, was oddly enough the one thing that made the whole unbelievable. I'll buy faster than light drive. I'll even buy the awkward configuration of the *Enterprise*, but an alien race so close to human that cross breeding is possible? Sorry, but no.

By now, if you've already read STARLORD, you've probably decided I'm campaigning for hypocrite of the year. Not so. True, the aliens in STARLORD as here presented are as human as anything a Hollywood make-up man ever produced, but I am not entirely to blame. The whole premise of Chris's story necessitates at least three races indistinguishable from Homo Sapiens.

But the real reason is that STARLORD is a fantasy. It's Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon. It's Star Trek. And so we can bend the truth a little, to allow for cross breeding, and romances between alien races. And, more important, we can have *fun* with it, something that tends often to get lost in the shuffle when one worries too much about whether or not a given alien is an accurate representative of his presumed environment. So, that's my excuse, and I'm sticking to it. As long as we remain on Earth, as long as that Magical First Contact remains something for books and movies and, yes, comics, Aliens will always look pretty much like Joe Blow from down the block, or the Creeping Blight, with little in between.

And I'll always have this invisible puppeteer walking along beside me, laughing.

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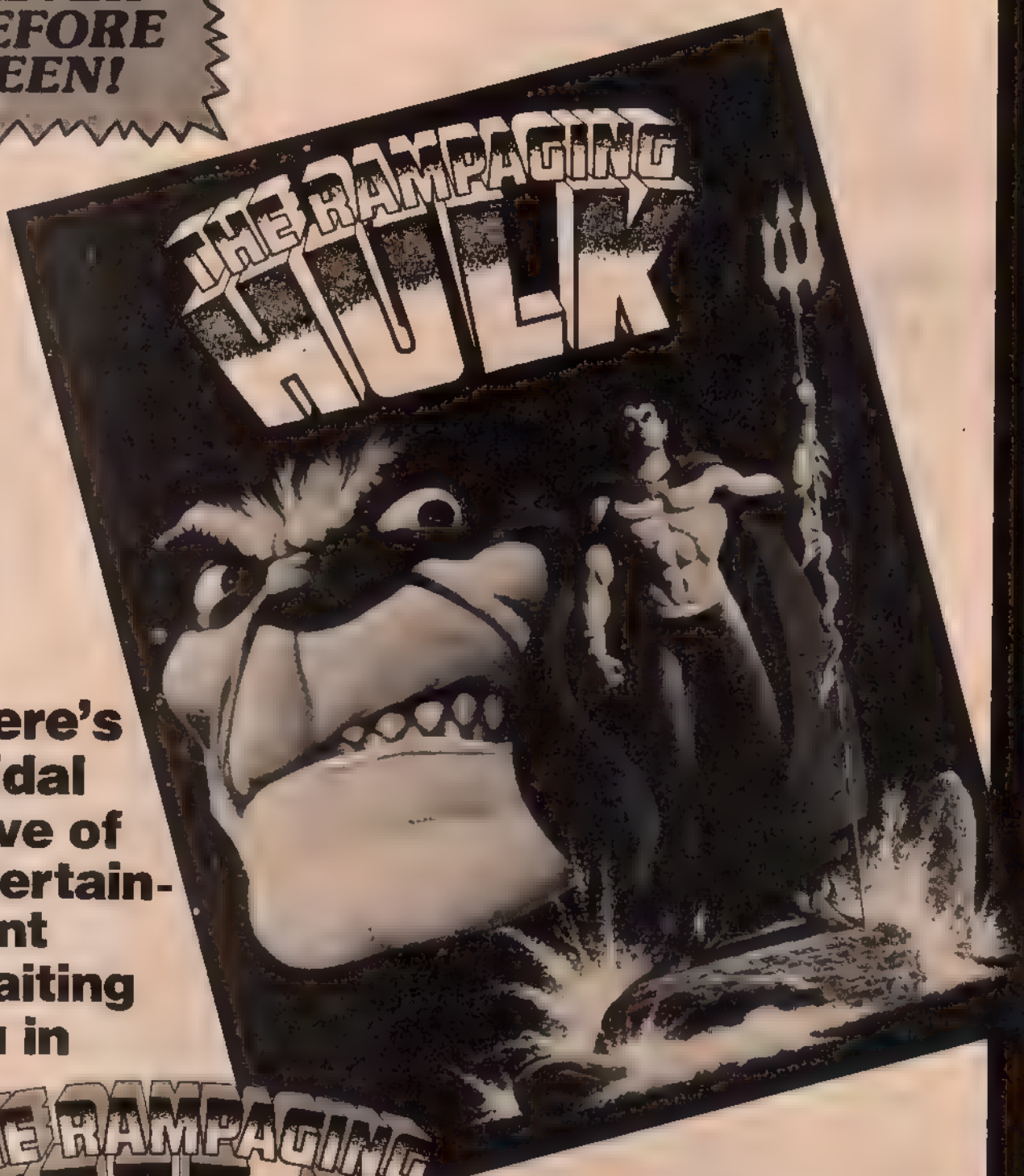

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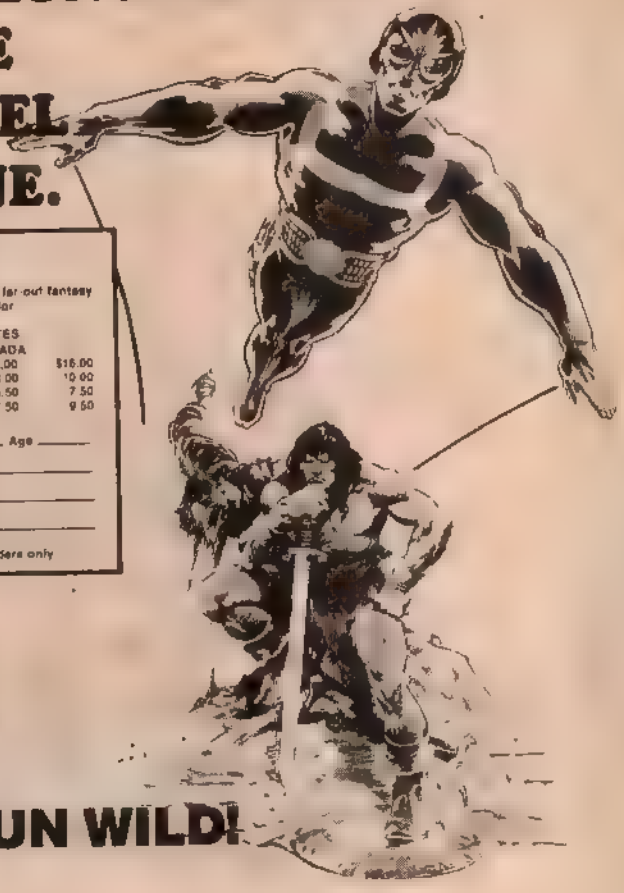

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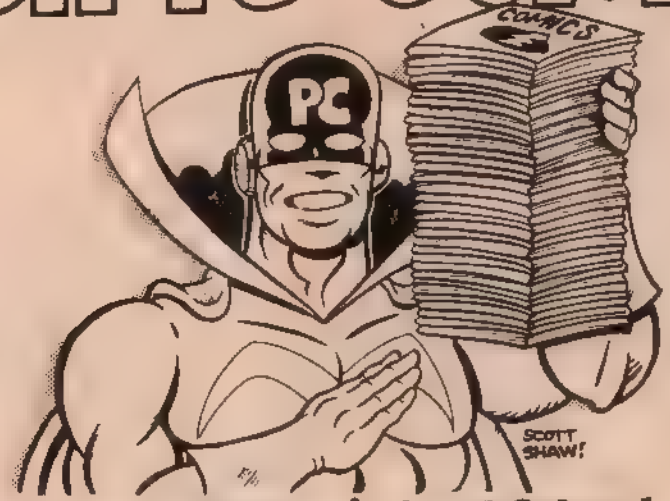

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PREVIEW REVIEW

People:

Congratulations on the first half of your Philip Wylie adaptation which appeared (finally) in MARVEL PREVIEW #9. I wondered initially if it would prove worthy of the wait, but I must now concede that it was. This tale of a man with super human abilities — without the usual trappings — proved to be a very human, very realistic story. And although I enjoy the usual fare from Marvel, this was truly something unique and unusual.

I have a rather ambivalent reaction to its continuation, however. YES, please adapt the second half of this story! There is no doubt as to the success of the first half, and I long to see the eventual fate of our Man-God. But, even if sales warrant it, don't turn MAN-GOD into a regular feature. This strip would not fit into the normal Marvel Universe with all of its super-heroes for one, and I shudder to think of what would be required of you to come up with numerous plots for our character: super villains, world-threatening menaces, and all the rest of the aforementioned usual trappings. I love this story, but I don't ever want to see its unique viewpoint ruined.

One criticism, which I realize was not your fault: That kitten that killed livestock will keep me chuckling for days. Just a little bit on the ludicrous side!

As for PREVIEW as a magazine — I realize that deadline hassles can come up on a magazine like this, but now that your magazine line is pared back, it seems that you could up its publication to bi-monthly. Also, I missed the letters page and editorial page this issue. Please print those pages instead of another article.

The love scenes in MAN-GOD were more explicit than usual, but then they were much more worldly than your typical ethereal couplings. Congratulations again, Roy. You're the best.

Mark Boersma
8114 Wissahickon Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19144

Well, thanks for the good words, Mark. Next to THOR THE MIGHTY, our MAN-GOD (nee TITAN) project had to be the longest-planned, longest-awaited story ever to appear in PREVIEW. But, we finally did it, folks. And, if the ream of mail we received is any indication, then that wait was well worth it . . just as you say, Mr. B.

And if the final sales results come anywhere close to reflecting the hoo-hah rave reviews tumbling into our mail bag, then the continuation of the Hugo Danner saga would almost certainly become a reality. (Provided, of course, that we could get a certainly Rascally writer to take enough time out from chronicling the adventures of his vast array of barbarians, jungle lords, and World War II super-heroes to do the deed.)

As to the future of MARVEL PREVIEW — read on, my friend, read on!

Dear Marvel:

Bring on the second part of MAN-GOD, and fast! I hope we don't have to wait a whole year for the conclusion! MARVEL PREVIEW #9 was the best issue since the SHERLOCK HOLMES saga. It was well worth DOUBLE the price on the cover! I can hardly wait for the second part (and maybe a sequel?).

Isn't MARVEL PREVIEW supposed to be a try-out magazine for proposed future series? I ask this because in all of its (so far) nine-issue history PREVIEW has not yet had a series emerge from one of its pilot stories. I think it's high time some changes were made along that line.

John Norman's TARNSMAN OF GOR would be a great science-fiction novel for adaptation in PREVIEW. If the adaptation should prove to be a success, you could then continue adapting Mr. Norman's GOR series — from TARNSMAN to OUTLAW, PRIEST-KINGS, NOMADS, and so on. I'm sure that the adventures of Tarl Cabot would become a Marvel-ous success in your hands.

Vin Sartain
4324 East Fourth Street
Stockton, CA 95205

An interesting possibility, indeed, Vin. We'll leave it to Marveldom Assembled to let us know if they'd be interested in seeing a GOR book. (That's your cue, People! Write and tell us, okay?)

And while it is true that no PREVIEW story has yet graduated to its own series, this very issue that you hold in your hands could change all of that. Of all the concepts presented thus far, none has yet claimed the critical and commercial success as has STAR-LORD! That's why we've given Peter Quill a second shot at (if you'll pardon the unfortunate play-on-words) stardom.

The next step is up to you, friends. As always, you are the final editors. If you like STAR-LORD, tell your friends. Tell total strangers. And, of course, tell us.

'Nuff said?

Dear Roy and Tody:

Stunning, savage, beautiful, and just overall fantastic! I cannot think of any other superlatives that can be used to describe your work on MAN-GOD in MARVEL PREVIEW #9.

I have been aware of Philip Wylie's novel for about five years, after having leafed through a friend's copy. But for reasons that have long been forgotten, I never picked up a copy for myself. Well, after reading your adaptation of the first part in MP #9, I went out to find a copy at a local bookstore and couldn't find one. Dang it!

Anyway, if I could vote on the awards that are given out for the best artist, writer, and such in the comic magazine industry, I would have to put you both up for writer and artist of the year.

Finally, I do want to see the rest of Hugo Danner's story, and the sooner the better. How about two days ago?

Keep up the excellent work.

Brian Collins HM 3/C
[illegible]
FPO San Francisco, CA 96601

Dear Stan, Roy, Tony and the gang:

It's painfully obvious that you put a great deal of effort into MAN-GOD. Beginning with the powerful Earl Norem cover, one could sense that this was something special. Paging through to the two-page introductory spread, . . was certain of it. I made up my mind to read this one slowly, so as not to miss a thing.

Roy, your captions and dialogue this issue attained a new high. They could have told the story of Hugo Danner even without Tony's inspired pictures. Your original yarns are nearly always a treat, but no one handles adaptations as deftly or as successfully as you. I can't wait to see your TARZAN.

Tony DeZuniga has become the premiere artist of the Marvel magazine line. His layouts are easy to follow, his street scenes capture the reality of the times.

I've but one question. After suffering through all of the many delays to read the first half of MAN-GOD, how long am I going to have to wait for the conclusion?

Ken Eubly
12053 Lake Avenue
Lakewood, OH 44107

Dear Marvel:

I would most certainly like to see the rest of GLADIATOR into comics form. Part one was extremely well done and much appreciated by this fan. Congratulations to one and all.

MARVEL PREVIEW is a fine magazine with unlimited potential. I'd especially enjoy seeing more of the Punisher. Or how about some black-&-white stories starring:

Ka-Zar
— Red Wolf
— The Son of Satan
— Nick Fury
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— Shanna the She-Devil
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— Devil-Slayer
— Moon Knight

Wally Hopkins
Box 428
Glen Carbon, IL 62034

Dear John,

I don't know how many letters I have written you lately about the shape of Marvel's magazine line — and I'm not sure how many were sent and how many I wound up tossing in the trash can. But I do know that I have very strong feelings about this topic, feelings I'm compelled to discuss again.

I just finished reading the last issue of DOC SAVAGE. It, like the seven issues before it, was my conception of what the perfect Marvel magazine should be. I feel that the efforts produced during the past few years in DOC SAVAGE, SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN, and DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU have been the most enjoyable and exciting since Marvel first got into this field.

As I've mentioned before, I will soon be graduating from high school and, eventually, entering college. Money is going to become tight. And since I'm a comics fan, I know a large portion of whatever extra cash I have will be funneled into your books. But I'll want to get my money's worth.

Frankly, I feel that the 30¢ comics format is no longer viable. By rights, the large size magazine should be the comic book on today. This is the place which comics should have evolved to by now. But, since companies have not seen fit to firmly establish themselves in this format, we must unfortunately consider them as the comics of tomorrow. Someday, all comics will have to be in this format. The small size is just plain obsolete. I will want to spend more of my money on magazines than comics after I'm "out there" — and I'll want to be purchasing magazines like SAVAGE SWORD, MARVEL PREVIEW, and RAMPAGING HULK. This is what I like best. You are doing things right with your magazine line, I really wish you could expand it.

Now that DOC SAVAGE and DEADLY HANDS are gone, what kind of line-up do we have? SAVAGE SWORD, HULK, and PREVIEW. The concepts and quality of each of these three mags is high — I always know that I will enjoy each and every issue.

I think, however, that you need one more magazine at least. Let me explain.

The concept behind MARVEL PREVIEW is great. Just as MARVEL PREMIERE is to the color books, MARVEL PREVIEW is the breeding ground for new, great ideas in the graphic arts. Characters of today can be studied and enjoyed. A book like MARVEL PREVIEW is definitely a must. However, it is not enough. True, one magazine devoted to trying out new ideas is really about all you need (even though I wish it was published more often). But what about all of the new ideas that have already been tried out — and do not deserve to fade away into oblivion? Concepts like DOC SAVAGE and DEADLY HANDS and SHERLOCK HOLMES and STAR-LORD and SATANA and all of the rest! Why not have a magazine so loosely structured that each issue is, in fact, an entirely different magazine unto itself? That way, the issue you are using for STAR-LORD in MARVEL PREVIEW could be devoted to another new concept! Just think, one issue we could be thrilling to a DOC SAVAGE super-saga by Moench and DeZuniga, the next we could find out what is happening with KILLRAVEN (by McGregor and Russell, of course) along with a further episode of SWORD IN THE STAR. THE SONS OF THE TIGER and other such KUNG FU features would aptly fill an issue. THE PUNISHER could live again — SHERLOCK HOLMES could solve another mystery — DEATHLOK, WARLOCK, TIGRA, STAR-LORD, MAN-THING, and all the other concepts of the 1970's could eventually have their return. I think it would work.

Let's face it, the comic book industry is surviving off the 1960's. The super-hero concept should have been phased out long ago — or at the very least, contained. Marvel boasts of a high college readership, but the comic book market is actually for the kids. Well, what about the kids who grew up? I have been reading comics for about twelve of my eighteen years, and I'm getting a little tired of reading the same old stuff over and over. The comic book industry is ignoring the people who made it great, the kids who grew up and want more mature books. KILLRAVEN and the BLACK PANTHER were aimed at a more adult audience, as is your magazine line.

But we need more!

I want to see all of those great concepts again, and a magazine like the one I suggest would see a return of the comics of the 1970's. Again, I say this is where comics should be for me to enjoy them. I liked IRON MAN and DAREDEVIL when I was young; I'm not young anymore. Let's see some more comics for the kids who grew up.

Thanks for listening. Keep up the good work — only more, more, more!

Terry R. Coyle
515 North Sycamore Street
Monticello, IA 52310

Well, Terry, as with your letter last issue, you've brought up some interesting points. However, you do seem to have made a few new statements which we could not let stand unrefuted.

While we, of course, think a great deal of the magazine format, we can't in good conscience simply abandon everything else in its favor. There are advantages and disadvantages to both the decades-proven comic book and the larger-sized magazine. And rest assured that we're constantly looking for new and exciting formats — our color KISS magazine being one current example.

Another statement that we just have to take issue with is your proclamation that the super-hero concept is out-of-date. The super-hero has been around longer than most of US, and he is still very much the backbone of the comics industry. Even such diverse strips as CONAN and SGT. FURY carry strong super-hero overtones with them. Beyond that, you seem to be saying that super-heroes are kid stuff that hold no interest for the adult, discerning reader. Well, that's just not so! It was Marvel's new approach to the super-hero that first brought us our "high college readership" as you so aptly put it — and if our mail is any indications, there's a goodly number of collegiate folk out there who are getting off on IRON MAN and DAREDEVIL even more NOW than they were in their younger days.

As to your suggested companion magazine for PREVIEW, we can't see that it is really any different from PREVIEW itself. Simply because a strip has gotten one try-out doesn't preclude it from having a second, this issue being a perfect example.

Dear Previewers,

Your story adaptation of Philip Wylie's GLADIATOR is another excellent tribute to a fine science fiction writer.

The story and art were simply spellbinding from start to finish. I sincerely hope that you'll be able to revive other MARVEL PREVIEW classics, such as STAR-LORD.

If I might be so bold as to make a suggestion, perhaps you might find your way possible to adapt more science fiction novels in future issues. Two that immediately come to mind are Micheal Crichton's THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN and H.G. Wells' THINGS TO COME.

Harold Stewart
1420 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10027

Well, Harold, PREVIEW isn't strictly an adaptation book, but we wouldn't rule out such stories in the future. (Though, truth to tell, THINGS TO COME probably stands a better chance of appearing in one of our MARVEL CLASSICS COMICS.)

All of which brings us to the close of yet another PREVIEW REVIEW. Now it's your turn. Like we said before, it's up to you to tell us what you thought about STAR-LORD. So WRITE already! Send your blasts, critiques, praise-paens, cosmic cream pies, and expired Kzinti licenses to:

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